



Museum Matters

Newsletter of Saffron Walden Museum Society Ltd

Summer 2020 Issue 51

In this Issue

- 1 Highlights and Happenings; From the Chairman
- 2 Curators Column;
- 2 Natural Sciences: Sarah Kenyon
- 4 Natural Sciences: James Lombard
- 5 Human History Collections: Jenny Oxley
- 7 Break a leg: Taxidermy conservation during lockdown: Charlotte Pratt
- 9 Object of the Month
- 15 Exhibitions and Upcoming Events: Charlotte Pratt
- 15 Museum Society News
- 15 Membership
- 16 Treasurer
- 16 Reports on Talks and Events
- 16 Who to contact . . .

Highlights and Happenings; From the Chairman

I must begin with news of our Annual General Meeting. This was in the diary for the 30th August next. It is not possible to hold our usual form of meeting with social distancing of 2 metres! The Board, who met on the 14th July, agreed to postpone the AGM until an alternative arrangement is approved. Under our Constitution we have until the 30th November to hold this so further news in due course.

"The most current happening is the coronavirus". This is how I began in the Spring Newsletter. I mentioned the Museum Management Working Group meeting and only a week later we were in lockdown. I am afraid that for members there have been no "happenings" with the Society. All talks and other meeting have had to be suspended but there may be a light at the end of the tunnel.

This did not mean that the Society stopped working altogether. The Board have held two meetings in April and July. We have had to hold these by Video Conferencing so "Zoom" has been a new word added to our communications. In April we had to accept Peter Walker's resignation as Treasurer and Company Secretary. As some members will know he is taking treatment with the NHS. The Board thanked him for his five years work in this role and hoped that his treatment would be successful. The Board were relieved that Christine Sharpe has agreed to take on this post. I do not think the Directors, especially Christine Sharpe, anticipated the difficulties that would be involved in a simple change of names!!! See her comments in her report. We also agreed to the purchase of Bronze Age bracelets although the acquisition process is currently 'on hold' due to Covid 19 restrictions, but we hope to report on the outcome in our next Newsletter.

In July we reluctantly agreed to postpone the AGM as I mentioned above. We have agreed with the Curator to assist in the reopening process of the Museum under the latest requirements under covid-19. As soon as the revised access is all agreed members will be invited to test out the new access arrangements. The invitation will

be sent in due course. We have also considered how we can continue a talk programme in the current restrictions on physical meetings. The Organisation Committee will be looking at possible options to provide alternatives to meeting in the Parish room.

The final report from Fourth Street, our redevelopment consultants was presented to the Project Steering Group via a "Zoom" meeting on the 15th June. The rest of the consultancy has been delayed as the Audience Development programme has been deferred by the covid-19 restrictions. There will be a stall in the Market square on the Saturday 22nd August run by the consultants to ask the public for views on future development so do have a look and take part. The Board have discussed this fully in preparation for a Development Committee meeting to consider our next steps. There are numerous options suggested which we now have to evaluate and to identify those which we feel are the most realistic.

Tony Watson

Curators Column;

Wallace waits to welcome you back to the Museum

Closure was swiftly thrust upon museums in March when lockdown started; the re-opening process by contrast is a lengthy and complex one, but we are working hard to get everything in place to welcome visitors back at the end of the summer. Museum Society members and all our volunteers will be given special priority to visit the Museum and view our new exhibition *Man and Beast* ahead of the general public. At present we are dependent on a variety of suppliers for equipment, PPE and other essentials, so we need some certainty over delivery dates and installation timetables before we can confirm when the Museum will open, but I hope by mid August we will be able to make an announcement. Society members will be among the first to know! Staff are gradually returning from home-working where possible and necessary, and we are all having to get used to new ways of working. Much other work has to continue besides, as my colleagues' contributions to this Newsletter testify.

Wallace, our lion and Museum mascot, is fortuitously 2 metres long from nose to tail, so he will be helping visitors with social distancing, as you will see. Full information on visiting arrangements will be sent out to Society members at a later date, meanwhile here are some of the things to expect on your visit:

- Visitor numbers will be carefully controlled, so it will be essential to book your timed visit in advance (full details on how to book will be provided later).
- There will be a member of staff to greet you on arrival, and help you to visit safely.
- You may be asked to confirm your name and contact (phone or email) for the Contact & Trace scheme (the government requires all museums to do this).
- You will be asked to use hand sanitiser on arrival and there will be plenty of sanitiser stations at key points round the Museum. There will be extra cleaning of touchable surfaces, though Wallace will be asking visitors to keep 'paws off' as far as possible!
- We encourage you to wear a face covering if you can. These are not mandatory for museums (unlike shops) but our small, enclosed galleries make it a sensible measure and staff will wear face coverings or visors in public areas of the Museum.
- There will be a one-way circulation route round the galleries, and procedures in place to limit use of the lift and toilets to one person, support bubble or household at a time.
- You will be able to buy souvenirs at the Welcome Desk and pay by card. We will have a new till and card reader for re-opening, with a large but unobtrusive screen to protect the person at the Welcome Desk.

Treasure news

Many, many thanks to members who kindly responded to our appeal for acquiring two gold Bronze Age bracelets in the last Newsletter. Like everything else, the treasure acquisition process has temporarily been suspended due to the effects of Covid 19, but look out for more news in the autumn!

Carolyn Wingfield

Natural Sciences: Sarah Kenyon

Well this is quite a different newsletter from the one I had anticipated! Due to Covid 19 Shirehill Museum store has become my new home from home. I started working there in isolation after lockdown commenced. The Natural Sciences store and the rooms in the rest of the building are much larger than at the museum so I and Fiona, my natural sciences assistant, have the room to social distance with ease. Our work has become IT based or concentrated on tasks behind the scenes. To help manage museum pests Fiona made up new pest traps for the year and we put these down when we collected up the old traps at the museum and store in April. When I checked the traps I found a carpet beetle larva and a clothes moth in one of the traps for the diorama case of the wildlife of North West Essex. The case was sprayed with a pesticide and here is a picture of me in museum PPE.



Thanks to Fiona the Shirehill Natural Sciences store has never been so clean. Dirt, debris, screws and paperclips have been hoovered out of the tracks for the roller racking and all floors vacuumed. Dust has been removed from all the boxes and metal shelving using damp cloths. We were really surprised at how dirty the water was, despite the store being cleaned before and after the collections were moved in.

Special roadside verges cannot have their ecological surveys this year because of lockdown, shielding and social distancing guidelines. However this does not mean that work ground to a halt. Essex County Council (ECC) sent PDF maps of the 46 verge sites from the geographic information system (GIS) at the council. These were reviewed and amended if the ECC maps were incorrect. Thanks to the verge volunteers who responded to my email queries about the maps and sent in reports of rare flowers when people were allowed outdoors again to exercise. 18 maps were sent back to ECC for amendment. The GIS layer will be sent out to councils, wildlife organisations and Essex Highways. So for the first time in a number of years there will be a definitive record of the special roadside verge sites which will assist in protecting and managing the sites.

Information about missing or damaged posts and plaques was also sent to ECC with 19 site maps or photographs. We hope that work will continue to get the sites properly marked on the ground. There has been a great deal of liaison by email about the verge along Audley End House wall which was damaged. The road was resurfaced, but the height of the carriageway caused vehicles to become stuck on the verge if they accidentally went off the edge of the road. The erosion damage was subsequently fixed with road planings, which are unsuitable for this ecologically sensitive site, and a tarmac pedestrian crossing point has been installed over the verge. Discussions about remedial action continue.



Sulphur Clover on the Ridgeons verge

Despite the current situation we have also been carrying out the routine jobs such as topping up the humidifier with water to keep the store moist during a very dry period in spring. We are trying to source a new, larger humidifier and will be progressing its purchase, together with contract work on the asbestos mineral specimens (thanks to part funding from the Museum Society), removal of old silica gel, policies and plans for accreditation and input into plans and PPE requirements to enable the museum to re-open safely.

Sarah Kenyon

Natural Sciences: James Lumbard

Geology Documentation project

By the time you read this, I should have worked my final hours on this project to improve the documentation of the objects on display in the Geology gallery. With great thanks to SWMS for funding the work to bring all of our digital records up to the minimum 'Inventory' level national standard, I have enjoyed spending one day per week in the Museum throughout lockdown (the timing is entirely coincidental). Over these 15 days, I have created or amended over 300 Modes records, taken and processed at least 1000 photographs, investigated dozens of possible matches for mystery objects and written over 160 entries into the accession register. However, this sort of work is rarely finished! More information on some of the fossils which are built in to cases may come to light if they ever need to be removed, or some old data may be unearthed while leafing through 19th-century accession registers for a completely different reason. In the meantime, there are the thousands of individual items in storage at Shirehill, a large portion of which would likely benefit from improved documentation and modern conservation or storage methods. But that's all for another day.



Wenlock fossil limestone from the Silurian period, over 250 million years ago. One of the objects matched to a record for a 'Temporary Box' stored at Shirehill

Environmental Monitoring

As mentioned in the last instalment of this newsletter, SWMS had kindly funded the purchase of a trial device to remotely record the temperature and relative humidity (RH) in galleries and stores. This has been installed since the end of May alongside an existing mechanical thermohygrograph (THG) to compare their performance. The new data logger doesn't need a new weekly paper chart, and can warn of temperatures or RH breaching acceptable levels via an email, text or smartphone notification. The main points of interest are understanding the huge amount of information (2000 rows of data each week with the current setup), its high sensitivity and fast response rate. For example, placing it near an air conditioner or dehumidifier produces alarming cycles of extreme readings which can skew average readings or cause unnecessary alarm calls. Practically, such cycles are buffered by the size of the room and by keeping most objects in display cases or storage boxes. The trial will continue for the rest of the year with the logger being tested in several areas and to help establish baseline information in places which are not currently monitored.

SWM el-wifi Test

Document ID: 904F-86AA817



Graph showing rapid cycles of RH produced by being simultaneously in the airstream of the air conditioner and near the dehumidifier.

Collections Care

On top of collections documentation and the storage environment, we have been working on the physical condition of the objects. In the geology gallery, a fossilised piece of driftwood was suffering from pyrite decay, where iron pyrite (fool's gold) in the fossil was reacting with moisture in the air. The reaction products can crack the specimen and cause it to crumble, while the sulphuric acid released as gas speeds up the reaction and can damage nearby items, even if they don't contain iron pyrite. The piece has now been isolated and is earmarked for later treatment with some other items from across the Museum.



Fossil driftwood with yellow crystals indicating pyrite decay.

We also used this as a chance to review the silica gel we use to control humidity in some display and storage cases and put in a new order to replace the current stock. This will ensure that our materials conform to modern health and safety standards and that the more sensitive items in the collection are being kept in a suitable environment.

Charlotte has been working with the mounted bird skin collection that was moved out of the Museum natural sciences store in the first part of the year. The birds are checked for pests and age damage as they are returned, and this has highlighted some pressing conservation work. Charlotte has already done brilliant work on a teal duck and a gull to clean the plumage and skin, revive paintwork on skin colours, refresh the 'real-life' backdrops in their individual cases and ensure the cases are properly sealed using fresh gum tape. All of this work is water-based and is easily reversed, as all museum conservation work should be. I'm looking forward to working more closely with her and picking up a few new skills as we move the rest of the collection back from its temporary home and address the inevitable conservation issues!

[Ed : Charlotte's report includes pictures of the Teal later in this Newsletter]

Human History Collections: Jenny Oxley

Unfortunately, with the Covid-19 lockdown coming into force from mid-March onwards, at very short notice we found ourselves unable to install our history of Essex fire-fighting exhibition, All Fired Up. We've since been in discussion with Essex Fire Museum at Grays who we are co-curating the exhibition with and it has now been re-scheduled to go ahead in 2021.

During lockdown we have moved more of our collections content online with articles on the new blog, "Explore with Saffron Walden Museum" (<https://exploresaffronwaldenmuseum.blogspot.com/>).

I've really enjoyed getting the chance to devote more time to researching and writing about the collections. I've

always loved working with historical costume, so I was really happy to write a 2 part blog called The Shape of Women, which focussed on the changing fashions of the female silhouette from 1790 to the present day, focussed particularly on the development of foundation garments such as bustles, crinolines and corsets in the 19th century. These articles are available on the following links;

Part1 – <https://exploresaffronwaldenmuseum.blogspot.com/2020/05/the-shape-of-women-c-17901900.html>

Part2 – <https://exploresaffronwaldenmuseum.blogspot.com/2020/05/part-2-shape-of-women-female-fashion.html>



Left: Silk wedding dress with Maltese lace, worn by Annie Jarvis at her wedding to Tom Sewell at Great Dunmow, 1907.

Centre: Black and white photograph of a navy coloured wedding dress c. 1910: bodice, skirt, waistband & underskirt.

Right: Jokey cartoon photograph – “The Hobble Skirt” – the speed limit skirt!

Other pieces I have researched and written for the blog recently have focussed on: the Myddylton Tapestries (furniture gallery), Napoleonic Prisoner of War crafted items, dummy boards, Chinese foot-binding, Holloway brooches, the history of photography, Staffordshire flat-back figurines (ceramics gallery), the Harts Printing Press (local history gallery) and a piece of medical equipment called The Improved Magneto-Electric Machine for Nervous Diseases!

Lockdown has also been a good opportunity to tidy up the collections records and I have been busy cataloguing records from the accession registers for the collections areas I lead on: costume & textiles, local & social history (including documents and photographs), world cultures and fine & decorative arts.

We've recently had a loan request from The Box in Plymouth who are curating the Mayflower 400: Legend and Legacy exhibition, as well as a second exhibition, Wampum: Stories from the Shells of Native America, in association with Wampanoag partners in the US.

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. In our collections we hold a Great Lakes area glass beaded back ornament (sized to fit a child), a couple of wampum belts and a couple of the bead strings.

As part of their project they have secured funding from the Arts Council to commission a new wampum belt to be made in the US. The loan request is partly the result of us hosting academic researchers from the On the Wampum trail project last year. If the Museum Society Board approve the loan then it will open at Sea City in Southampton on the 15 August and run for 3 months, and may be extended for the longer tour subject to agreement. Transport would be provided by Constantine (fine art and museum removers) with the borrower covering the costs.

Request for help with research project



Martin Barry, a PhD student from Bristol University, is researching 'The Materiality, Memories & Material Culture' of Princess Mary's 1914 (WW1) Christmas Gift to Soldiers & Sailors. Let him know if you are still in possession of your relatives embossed brass 'Mary Tin'. He would like to interview relatives by phone or virtually via Zoom. Contact mb12582@bristol.ac.uk

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).

Break a leg: Taxidermy conservation during lockdown: Charlotte Pratt

Work behind the scenes has continued at the Museum despite the strange times we have found ourselves in. One of the important jobs was the sealing of the natural history store to protect the specimens stored there from insect pests. In order to give the workman safe access to the store, many of the specimens had to be moved. This was a great opportunity to look over the specimens that were moved and identify any that need conservation. It is not a particularly well kept secret that my "odd hobby" is taxidermy, and last year as a busman's holiday I attended a taxidermy conservation course taught by Simon Moore M.I.Sc.T., A.C.R Adviser and Conservator of Natural Sciences to the National Trust. The course was held at Reading Museum and I had the opportunity to work on a conserved range of specimens, including a pair of mildewy puffins and an otter who was suffering hair loss. Later in the year I took another busman's holiday to intern with Simon at Calke Abbey, the property that houses the National Trust's largest natural history collection. The internship gave me some fantastic experiences in the conservation of natural history collections, including stabilising a tiger skin rug and surveying the whole collection for pests and environmental damage.

Whilst helping to move some of the specimens in SWM store I identified a few items that needed attention and offered to use some of my time while the Museum is closed to carry out some conservation. My first project was a black-backed gull with a broken leg.



The first step was to assess the damage on the specimen, the leg being the most obvious issue but there were also some broken/misaligned feathers and no base, the skin was also coloured incorrectly. I made a simple base out of plasztazote and realigned the skin of the broken leg so the seagull stood on its new base.



I conserved the skin on the broken leg using conservation PVA (natural PH) and conservation Japanese tissue. Japanese tissue is excellent for taxidermy conservation as it retains its strength even at low GSMs and is very fibrous, which means when you tear it you have a feathered edge, which makes the repair less visible. I repaired the broken feathers and realigned the feathers on the body so the seagull was "groomed". Next came the repainting; the legs, beak and skin around the eyes were not the correct colour so all needed to be recoloured. All of the work carried out has to be reversible, so I used gouache paint which could be removed with a damp cotton swab if desired. The black backed gull is now looking much livelier and more importantly will last longer and be fit for display in the future.

I have also worked on a teal which had been damaged by mildew and pests before and after pictures below. Next for conservation - a blackbird with a wobbly head!

Before



And on the next page - After



Object of the Month

May 2020

Hawkmoths

Chosen by: Sarah Kenyon

May's 'Object of the Month' features a selection of Hawk-moths. They have been chosen by Sarah Kenyon, one of the Natural Sciences Officers at Saffron Walden Museum, from moths preserved in a wooden cabinet of British moths. It belonged to George Stacey Gibson of Saffron Walden who collected the insects before 1883.

In the left column at the top you can see an Eyed Hawk-moth with a pupa, the black and blue eye spots on its hind wings are used to scare predators. Below that is a Poplar Hawk-moth with its caterpillar that feeds on poplar tree leaves and, at the bottom, a Lime Hawk-moth. Its large, bright green caterpillar eats the leaves of lime, silver birch and elm trees.

In the centre you can find a Death's-head Hawk-moth and its caterpillar which eats Potato and Deadly Nightshade plants. This moth is a migrant visitor to Britain between August and October. It squeaks when alarmed and is recognised by a skull marking on the back of its chest (thorax). Below that is a Convolvulus Hawk-moth, and at the bottom, a Privet Hawk-moth one of our largest moths found in gardens.



On the right there is a Spurge Hawk-moth, below that a Madder Hawk-moth and its caterpillar which is now called the Bedstraw Hawk-moth, a Striped Hawk-moth and, at the bottom, an Oleander Hawk-moth. They are all migrant moths.

Hawk-moths information

These large moths of the insect family Sphingidae are beautiful and easy to identify. So they are great for budding lepidopterists. Nine species breed in Britain and eight visit as migrants including Death's-Head, Convolvulus, Spurge, Bedstraw, Striped, Oleander and Hummingbird hawk-moths. Different hawk-moth species can be found from May to December in gardens, parks, woods or allotments. Some fly at night and are attracted to lights or they can be found resting on tree trunks and on leaves of the plants their caterpillars eat. Others such as the Hummingbird Hawk-moth drink nectar from flowers with a long tube called a proboscis.

You might find a pupa when digging in your garden or allotment. This is the hard case a caterpillar forms when it changes into an adult moth, in a process called metamorphosis. Some pupae can move as a defence mechanism. This happened when I was identifying one and it shocked me so much that I dropped it!

Please bury a pupa again if you find one.

Check out these websites to help you learn more about Hawk-moths and how to identify them.

UK Moths Beginners Top 20 - <http://www.ukmoths.org.uk/top-20> and family Sphingidae

www.ukmoths.org.uk/search/?entry=Sphingidae&thumbnails=true

Butterfly Conservation with an identification guide - www.butterfly-conservation.org/search?query=hawkmoth

The Essex Field Club website has maps showing where each moth species has been found in Essex www.essexfieldclub.org.uk/portal/p/Species+account/s/Mimas+tiliae Select 'next species' on this page to move to the next moth or search for hawk-moth on the website.

If you really get the bug you could join the Essex Moth Group www.essexfieldclub.org.uk/portal/p/Essex+Moth+Group

Unfortunately this is a virtual Object of the Month during this difficult time. However, when the Museum is open again you will be able to see these hawkmoths on display upstairs in the natural history gallery.

George Stacey Gibson (1818-1883)

Image : George Stacey Gibson by G.Foster

The Gibson family were wealthy Quakers who made their money from land, banking, brewing and public houses, including the Sun Inn. George was born in 1818, the son of Wyatt George Gibson and his wife Deborah, who was from the Stacey family. Wyatt Gibson built the Boys' British School and left £5,000 for the building of a hospital (now the Uttlesford District Council offices). His brother Francis laid out Bridge End Gardens and his other brother Jabez sank a deep well in 1835 so that Saffron Walden had a clean water supply.

George Stacey Gibson was a naturalist, banker and benefactor to the Saffron Walden area. As a young man he made many excursions into the countryside, keeping field notes of plants and starting a herbarium, which is a collection of dried, pressed plants mounted on sheets of paper, and sometimes bound into in a book, with descriptions of when and where they were found. When he produced his work on the species of plants to be found around Saffron Walden he had recorded 588. In 1862 George published the first Flora of Essex at a cost of 6/-. It remained the standard reference work for a century comprising common and rare plants growing in Essex, some of which had not been discovered before. There are original copies in the Town Library. He also collected Red Crag fossils from the cliffs at Walton-on-the-Naze and purchased minerals and rocks to form his geology collection.



In 1845 George married Elizabeth Tuke and they moved to Hill House at the south end of the High Street. A blue plaque identifies this house. He laid out 11 acres of different gardens around the house and employed the services of William Chater a Saffron Walden nurseryman. A summerhouse was built onnd the corner of what is now Margaret Way and you can still see some boulders which were part of his collection. In the summer there would be Open Days when the public were invited in. There was an Anglo-Saxon cemetery in the back garden of Hill House and George organised an excavation in 1876.

Now the town had fresh water the family disposed of most of their brewing interests. A family partnership had started Saffron Walden & North Essex Bank in 1824. George entered the partnership in 1839. He brought his brother-in-law, William Murray Tuke, into the bank which was renamed Gibson, Tuke & Gibson. New premises were built in the Market Place and it became part of Barclays in 1896.

He played a huge part in public life serving on Saffron Walden Town Council from 1859 until his death in 1883. George was mayor for two years from 1875 to 1877. He was also a Justice of the Peace and vice-chairman of the Board of Guardians that administered the Poor Law and the workhouse. He was instrumental in bringing the railway to Saffron Walden in 1865 because of the economic benefits it could bring. He was active in the society that formed the Library and was involved in the reorganisation of Saffron Walden Museum. Gibson was a regular benefactor to Saffron Walden and the surrounding parishes. He and his mother paid for the drinking fountain in 1863. Gibson also oversaw the construction of the Town Hall and funded an extension which opened in 1879. He followed family tradition by supporting the Boys' British School, the hospital, expanding the almshouses and founding a small orphanage. He donated land for a school and was influential in the relocation of the Friends' School from Croydon to Saffron Walden in 1879.

After he died his beneficiaries included the hospital, library, schools, almshouses, orphanage, Society of Friends and Saffron Walden Museum. During his life and in his will he donated many objects to the Museum including finds from the Anglo-Saxon Cemetery, part of his herbarium, cabinets of butterflies, moths and fossils; minerals, shells, birds and birds' eggs, panels from the Sun Inn; the portrait of Henry Winstanley and drawings of the lighthouse; and for the ethnography collection decorated bark cloth, a Navaho saddle blanket and a green arrow head from New Zealand. Autographed letters from eminent people included correspondence from Henry VII, Napoleon, Joseph Banks and Queen Victoria. He also left funds to provide a salary for the first paid Curator – George Maynard.

If you want to know more about George, then Jeremy Collingwood's book "Mr Saffron Walden. The Life and Times of George Stacey Gibson (1818 -1883)" is still available. Members of Saffron Walden Museum Society can read notes of a talk George Stacey Gibson – Aspects of his life and achievements given by speakers Jeremy Collingwood, Len Pole and Sarah Kenyon in Newsletter 45, Summer 2018, pages 15-17

June 2020

Fossil Shells

Chosen by James Lumbard

June's Object of the Month celebrates Volunteers' Week. These fossils have been cleaned and recorded by two dedicated geology volunteers, helping to audit the thousands of fossils held in the Museum's stores. The project is suspended at the moment, but we all look forward to getting back together when times are better.

These fossils are from the Red Crag layers, which are the reason Walton-on-the-Naze is famous for marine fossils. The sandy Red Crag rocks and fossils were laid down in the late Pliocene and early Pleistocene epochs between 3.3 and 2.5 million years ago, when a warm, shallow sea and bay covered most of Essex. The fossils have stained red-brown over time due to iron-rich water washing through the sandy rock.

The first fossil is a species of whelk, *Neptunea contraria*, which is still alive today (extant, rather than extinct). This species has an unusual left-spiral shell, hence the word *contraria* in its scientific name. Almost all species with a coiled shell have a right-hand spiral.

Neptunea contraria



Cardita senilis



Cardita senilis is a species of bivalve, a group which also includes oysters, mussels and scallops. These molluscs have a flattened body protected by two shells or valves joined by a hinge. A bulge near the hinge, called the umbo, is the oldest part of a growing shell, and is at the centre of the growth rings that can sometimes be seen on the surface.

Spinucella tetragona is an extinct species of predatory sea snail, in a group known as murex snails or rock snails. This species' shells are highly ridged, but other extant species (such as *Chicoreus aculeatus*) have exaggerated and complicated patterns of spines on their shells, which makes them very popular with shell collectors.

Spinucella tetragona



Chicoreus aculeatus



Oyster: *Ostrea species*



Later Pleistocene fossils from Essex, such as the oyster, don't really 'belong' here at all. They were brought south or churned up from older rocks by glaciers during the Pleistocene Ice Age, which lasted from 2.5 Mya to 12,000 years ago. They appear in glacial drift deposits left behind as the glaciers grew and shrank. This fossil of *Chicoreus aculea* is actually from the Jurassic period (201-145 Million years ago).

All images © Saffron Walden Museum, except *C. aculeatus*: H. Zell – Own work, CC BY-SA 3.0

July 2020
Hipposandal
Chosen by Carolyn Wingfield

July's Object of the Month has been chosen by Curator, Carolyn Wingfield. It's an iron 'hipposandal' found near Wixoe, Suffolk in 1985 by a metal-detectorist.

Before nailed on horseshoes were developed in Medieval times, the Romans developed a horse-shoe which was essentially an iron sandal strapped onto the horse's foot; 'hipposandal' comes from the Greek word hippos which means 'horse'.

Our hipposandal is partly bent and has the back wings and upper frontal loop missing, but the iron plate, which covered the underside of the horse's foot, is intact, with parts of the side wings.



How were hipposandals used?

Iron hipposandals (*soleae ferreae*) were removable temporary horseshoes, which were used to protect the hooves of working horses. They were first introduced in the Celtic-Roman area north of the Alps in the mid-1st century AD and were in use until around the 5th century AD, when they were largely replaced by nailed on horseshoes.

The iron soles of the hipposandals were marked with grooves, with an oval-shaped thick metal cup above that, which would have enclosed and protected the hoof. They were fastened to the horse using metallic clips and leather laces. This particular example from our collections has the back wings and upper frontal loop missing.

Wearing Hipposandals gave working horses' better traction and protected their hooves, particularly on rough ground and metalled tracks. Wearing them greatly improved the efficiency and resilience of the animals. There were also versions known as *kureisen* (cure shoes) which were worn to help treat and protect a horse if it had diseased hooves.

The word hipposandal is derived from Ancient Greek as the word "hippos" means horse. Hence the word "hippodrome," which we now use to mean a theatre, but which originally was the name for an ancient Greek stadium for horse and chariot racing.

Where did this one come from?

This item was donated to the Museum in 1985 by a metal-detectorist and researcher along with a collection of shell and pottery fragments (which included sherds of Nene Valley fine-ware) and belemnite fossils all collected in the same area of Wixoe.

Wixoe is a village in West Suffolk, located on the bank of the River Stour, 2 miles south-east of Haverhill. It was recorded in the Domesday Book as having covered 600 acres and was one of the smallest parishes in the hundred of Risbridge. Today, many of its cottages are Victorian and it has a 12th century church, St Leonard's.

Roman remains have been frequently found in the vicinity of Wixoe, mostly on the Essex side of the Stour. In 1803, close to Watsoe Bridge, an earthwork enclosure was identified as a 'camp', along with two cemeteries. In 1973 aerial photography showed many large pits, two streets and a building with flint foundations, close to the river. Field-walking and metal detection over many years have revealed multiple finds of Roman coins and other artefacts, including brooches, figurines, pottery.

The assumption of archaeologists and historians is that Wixoe in Roman times occupied between 12 and 24 hectares, and was one of eight small Roman towns in Suffolk, which included Icklingham, Long Melford and Felixstowe.

In 2011, on the Suffolk side of the Stour, archaeological surveying and excavation work undertaken during the Abberton pipeline installation, revealed a small town which was likely to have been occupied between 100-400 AD. Its road connections were the real advantage of the town's location.

The Via Devana, a military track, which ran from Chester to Colchester, would have passed through Wixoe. Another road would have led east from Wixoe, on the north side of the Stour, passing through Long Melford, before heading north-east to Baylham and probably on to Dunwich. A third road led north, probably towards Icklingham and the Icknield Way. A fourth road, close to the Ains Ford, is thought to have run towards the major Roman fort at Great Chesterford, on a more southerly section of the Icknield Way. There is no clear trace of these roads immediately outside Wixoe, but it is likely that they have been eroded by ploughing or incorporated into the existing field boundaries. Evidence suggests that the Stour may have also been navigable as far as Wixoe by flat-bottomed boats. There may even have been a wharf there at one time.

The town appears to have been a planned rural commercial centre, rather than one which evolved naturally from an earlier settlement. It is most likely that it was built after the Boudiccan revolt and sacking of Camulodunum (Colchester) in AD60-61. The archaeological evidence suggests that its wealth was focussed on industrial production relying on local timber (charcoal) and imported metals. It appears to have consisted of largely timber-framed domestic buildings, with evidence of courtyards, boundary ditches, industrial ovens and hearths showing the remains of lead and iron workings, with cobbled surfaces and pits used for quarrying.

Use of horses in Roman Britain

Battle

The Romans used horses primarily for battle; horsemen fought as a secondary force to the infantry soldiers. They would have initially fought on the wings of the battle formation. It was the job of the cavalry to prevent the enemy from outflanking the infantry, who would have been positioned in the centre of the formation. When the Romans turned a battle in their favour and the enemy began to retreat, the cavalry would then move forward to cut them down. The use of horses in battle enabled the Roman army to move faster and more efficiently. Horse riders also played other crucial non battle roles for example courierring urgent messages and acting as scouts investigating new territories.

Agriculture & Industry

In Romano-Britain, horses were used in the majority of agricultural processes as draught animals, alongside donkeys and oxen. In industrial processes their walking motion would have been used to power heavy machinery, for example in milling flour or operating a saw mill.

Transport

The majority of Romano-British people would have travelled on foot, but those who were wealthier such as merchants would have used horses for transport, as did the military and government. Rest stops would have provided those travelling long distances with a chance to rest and change horses.

Chariot Racing & Public Events

In ancient Rome, chariot racing was extremely popular. Races were held in what was called a "circus" because of the oval shape of the stadium. The most famous and oldest of these is the Circus Maximus in Rome. The closest chariot racing circuit in Romano-Britain would have been the Camulodunum Circus (Colchester). The Romans loved a spectacle and in addition to the chariot racing they would have also had hunting shows, where venatores, often on horseback themselves, would have hunted herds of wild animals including horses for the assembled audience's enjoyment.

References

Manning, W.H. (1985). Catalogue of Romano-British Iron Tools, Fittings and Weapons in the British Museum, BMP, London.

Colchester's Roman Circus Centre, Colchester Archaeological Trust: <https://www.romancircus.co.uk/>

Exhibitions and Upcoming Events: Charlotte Pratt

Man and Beast A cultural History of Animals.

Corona Virus has disrupted even the best laid plans and so the Museum team have unfortunately had to change our plans for our exhibitions, activities and events this year. "All Fired Up", the exhibition about the Essex Fire Service, has been postponed until next year which has left a gap in our exhibition calendar. The Museum team however has risen to the challenge and at time of writing we are working on a new exhibition; to be ready for when the Museum can safely open its doors to the public again.

The new exhibition "Man and Beast, A cultural History of Animals" will explore the role of animals in culture from its prehistoric roots to the pop culture of today, using a sample of animal species represented in the Museum's collections.

The role of animals in human culture has varied widely across the world and through time. Humans have perceived, used and treated animals in many different ways. From religious icons to advertising, from food to the unwitting figureheads of the environmental movement; animals are as fundamental to our lives today as they were to the prehistoric people who painted their images on cave walls.

We have begun to research and select objects from our collections relating to our six animal categories, ungulates, insects, canines, bees, snakes and raptors. We have picked out a beautiful bracelet from the ethnographic collections made from the wing cases of jewel beetles.

You can also expect to see a some falconry hoods, a pack of tiny dogs and some amazing natural history specimens.



Our very own Len Pole also features in the exhibition, representing "man" on the text panels and poster – we think he looks rather dashing!

Museum Society News Membership

Thank you to most members who have supported us and paid their subscriptions promptly, in many cases with a little extra.

May I remind others that if subscriptions remain unpaid at 30 September, under the Society rules, membership will lapse.

Membership cards were sent out in March with the annual invitation to renew membership. For those on email, this would have been as an attachment, ready for printing.

Christine Sharpe

Treasurer

As many members are aware, I took over as Treasurer of the Society on 1 June and I am incredibly grateful to Peter Walker who made huge efforts to make the handover of all the financial matters easy. Thank you, Peter.

Covid-19 has been responsible for many problems but the fact that many people have worked remotely has highlighted organisations where systems are not good. One took six weeks to reply to an email which then told us that to get an answer we needed to telephone! Another has taken eleven working days to make a change which I was assured would take two to three days. Another problem arose when a cheque stayed unbanked in an office which had not been manned since March but sadly, we had been omitted from their list to advise all contacts.

I would have despaired but for the organisation where a contact telephoned me to say that I would be emailed a link to set up my details, but he was sorry that there could be a delay of two days. On the contrary, the link arrived and took effect the same day. Hurrah!

This change over has been made easier by the support of my fellow board members. Thanks to them all, we are almost there!

Christine Sharpe

Reports on Talks and Events

As you will be aware, regrettably it was necessary to cancel the planned programme of Talks from March onwards. Planning for future talks is also affected given the current state of advice on the acceptable size of public meetings, but when the situation allows the resumption of some kind of talks we will advise Members as soon as possible.

Distribution List

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

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

Who to contact ...

Museum Society

Donations/legacies: Christine Sharpe 01799527546
Membership: Christine Sharpe 01799 527546
Newsletter: Tony Morton 01799 523489
Talks: Heather Salvidge 01279 814153

Museum

Carolyn Wingfield, Curator (cwingfield@uttlesford.gov.uk)
Wendy-Jo Atter, Museum Admin Officer (watter@uttlesford.gov.uk)
Sarah Kenyon, Natural Sciences (skenyon@uttlesford.gov.uk)
Charlotte Pratt, Education and Outreach Officer (cpratt@uttlesford.gov.uk)
James Lumbard, Natural Sciences (jlumbard@uttlesford.gov.uk)
Jenny Oxley, Human History Collections (joxley@uttlesford.gov.uk)
Stefan Shambrook, Security & Premises Officer (sshambrook@uttlesford.gov.uk)

Telephone numbers:
Museum 01799 510333
Shirehill 01799 510631

Saffron Walden Museum Society Limited
Museum Street
Saffron Walden, CB10 1BN
Telephone: 01799 510333
Company Registration no: 6469141 Charity no: 1123209



Museum Society e-mail address
SaffronWaldenMS@gmail.com
Museum Society web site
www.swmuseumsoc.org.uk