



Museum Matters

Newsletter of Saffron Walden Museum Society Ltd

Autumn 2020 Issue 52

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Highlights and Happenings; From the Chairman

I can begin with the good news that the Board agreed to hold the AGM on the 27th November by post, telephone or email. You will already have had all the details of the arrangements. The Voting form will be delivered shortly. As far as I know this is the first time the Society has not been able to hold the AGM with members present in person. I hope that all members will be able to take part in this important review of the last year and the appointment of officers on the board and other re-appointments. I do hope that we will all be able to meet again in person for next years AGM.

“The most current happening is the coronavirus”. These words have been part of both the last two reports from me. Unfortunately we are still having to rearrange our affairs to comply with covid -19. As a result of discussions by the Board and the Organisation Committee we agreed to try to have a talk by video on “Zoom”. The response to Paul Salvidge’s request was good. Richard Priestley agreed to find the necessary skills to host a meeting on the 13th October. Details of the talk will appear later in the newsletter but, on behalf of you all, I have already thanked Richard for his skill in hosting this talk. Arrangements are now in hand to hold further “Zoom” talks next year. Thank you to all those who took part.

The Board have continued to hold their meetings on Zoom. Although meetings of the Development Committee and the project steering group have also met by Zoom the Organisation Committee held a socially distanced meeting in the museum. We need to thank the Curator, Carolyn, and the staff for making this possible.

The re-opening of the museum may take place soon. The Curator has spent many hours getting all the requirements in place so I hope you will all make use of the revised arrangements when they are available. It will, however, mean we will have to book to visit and not just drop in. The latest news looks like a further general lock down may happen in November which may further delay a re-opening. See the Curators articles in this newsletter.

The final report from Fourth Street, our redevelopment consultants, was received last June. We had a Zoom meeting with Julia Holbery Associates in October when we received video details of their audience development report. We were able to discuss this and a final written report should be with us by the end of October. There are numerous options which we have to evaluate and to identify those which we feel are the most realistic. The Development Committee and the Board have been impressed with the response to the Click and Collect service introduced by Charlotte Pratt during the Museum Closure. Well done Charlotte. Further news on progress next year.

Tony Watson

Curators Column; The Long Road to Re-opening

Until this Newsletter was about to go to press, I hoped that we would shortly be opening the Museum's doors to Society members and welcoming you back, ahead of the general public. The announcement of a new lockdown period from 5 November to at least 2 December has postponed that for the time being, but I welcome this opportunity to report on progress and look forward to the time when you will be able to visit.

The card reader to complete our 'cashless payments' system had to be replaced because it would not work with new till as it should have done, but I am pleased to say that last week a new card reader arrived. As I write (2 November) there are still a few issues to resolve with the system but it is moving forward, with the help of our colleagues in IT. Thanks go to our Front-of-House & Admin Officer Wendy-Jo Atter, who has been working well beyond her part-time hours, and to Welcome Desk volunteer June Baker. June has been working with Wendy-Jo on the new manual for the Desk and advising from the volunteers' perspective. Essential work will continue during lockdown to get the Museum 'visitor ready' for whenever restrictions are lifted.

Meanwhile the Museum team is concentrating on the positive work of preparing for visitors, adapting services for the 'new normal' where possible, and all the routine work of running the Museum and other project we are engaged in. We all look forward to offering visitors the opportunity to engage with our shared cultural and environmental heritage again in a meaningful and enjoyable way. Here are some of the things you can expect, to welcome you back safely when the time comes:

- Pre-booked visits for a specific date / time
- Help on the door from a member of staff, to welcome you and make sure Covid safety measures are followed
- Face coverings to be worn in the museum and social distancing maintained
- Lots of hand sanitiser, and extra cleaning in galleries
- A signed route round the museum
- WCs – one at a time please!
- Card payments and safe handling for souvenirs



The new gateway to the Museum, with thanks to Council officers Nicola Wittman and Lewis Merle, in consultation with Historic England, for enhancing the site pedestrian access with the new gateway. The decision rests with the Council and Historic England on when opening the Castle will be possible, meanwhile at least the floodlighting makes a feature on dark winter evenings.

Dubnovellaunos Ruled OK!



This striking gold coin, little bigger than a 5p piece (remember cash?) is 2,000 years old and is a very welcome recent donation to the collections. It was found in the Stansted area and was kindly donated by the finder and landowners (finds of single gold or silver coins are excluded from the Treasure Act).

Long before Britain was absorbed into the Roman Empire in AD 43, the late Iron Age tribes and rulers of southern Britain were issuing their own sophisticated coinage in gold, silver and alloys of copper and tin (bronze and potin). This coin is a small gold denomination known as a quarter stater, and can be attributed to a powerful British leader called Dubnovellaunos. His name means 'world ruler' and he may have been king of Kent (Cantiaci tribe) before extending his authority north of the Thames over the Trinovantes tribe (who occupied most of modern Essex and southern Suffolk. If so, Dubnovellaunos was probably displaced as ruler of Essex by Cunobelin in around AD 10.

The obverse has a decorative band or wreath across the centre with two crescents back-to-back, and a round pellet on either side. The reverse, which has been struck off-centre, depicts a horse (a very common motif on late Iron Age coinage) with part of a leafy branch below its hooves and other symbols round it. We do not know exactly what significance all these motifs had to the Iron Age Britons but they struck a huge number of coins in a great variety of designs. The study of these coins and their distribution is an important source of information for a period when we have no written history from Britain and only a small number of references from Roman sources. British rulers did however use the Latin alphabet to add their name to some of their coins, and comparison with named coins means that we can ascribe this little quarter stater to the coinage of Dubnovellaunos.

Carolyn Wingfield

Natural Sciences: Sarah Kenyon

Gosh, where does the time go! We have started working at the Museum as well as the Museum store. To get ready for the Museum re-opening Fiona and I have been converting hand held gallery labels and information sheets to digital versions and putting up laminated labels all over the natural history galleries.

Some specimens, such as the much loved fox and hedgehog, have been put into storage because they cannot be sanitised if they are touched. Magazines and leaflets have also been removed to reduce the risk from Covid 19.

Essential work has been taking place at Shirehill Natural Sciences store. The humidifier has been cleaned and the filter changed. This machine adds moisture to the air when the humidity in the store is too dry, which causes collections to become brittle and crack. This turned out to be a big job because of the limescale that had accumulated from using tap water when supplies of distilled water ran out. If this happens again tap water needs to be filtered before it is used in the machine. Not a very glamorous job but very satisfying and essential. Here are pictures of the dirty filter and the machine before and after it was put back together.



The disassembled Humidifier



The Filter



Reassembled and ready to go

Contractors also worked on the quarantined asbestos minerals to ensure that they can be accessed safely for research and display. We are waiting for one more Perspex box for a mineral at the Museum and the job will be complete. Thank you to Saffron Walden Museum Society and Uttlesford District Council for the funding.

I met with Essex Highways and one of our Councillors at Audley End House special roadside verge to discuss the process and materials for highway repairs and how protection for these sites can be strengthened. It was reassuring to see that plants were growing through the road plantings, including rare Lesser Calamint plants, one of which is pictured to the right. Our wonderful verge volunteers are checking special verge sites to make sure they all have their full cuts in October and November.



Human History Collections: Jenny Oxley

Research Enquiry: Karl Weschke, Sculpture: 'Deutschland 1946'

Despite the museum having been physically closed to the public because of Covid-19 for many months, we thankfully continued to receive many interesting research enquiries. Maybe in lockdown, some researchers had fewer competing distractions! For us, working behind the scenes, the constant flow of research enquiries was a godsend and ensured the collections have still been utilised.

One such researcher, Matthew Retallick, contacted us as he's begun working on his PhD, the first ever in-depth academic study into the life and work of the famous artist Karl Weschke.

The museum holds a very evocative sculpture by Weschke of a weeping mother and child, titled 'Deutschland 1946' which he produced using clay he dug up at the Radwinter POW camp when he was interred there. Some have claimed it may even be the artist's earliest known work.



Weschke was born in Germany in 1925 and became a member of the Hitler Youth. In 1945, he was described as "insolent" when he was captured and ended up in a camp for hard-line prisoners in Caithness. His Communist mother petitioned for him to be freed in a prisoner exchange, but it fell through. It was eventually decided that he was young and didn't really pose any real threat, so he was moved to a more lenient student's POW camp at Radwinter.

Radwinter North camp had been established in the grounds of the requisitioned Radwinter Rectory, now known as Radwinter Manor. The camp was the brainchild of Charles Stambrook, a Jewish refugee from Vienna. It was intended to be a way to reach out to those it was felt could be "re-educated."

The German POWs regularly visited local families, as it was felt that this would help "rehabilitate" and integrate them better into the local community. Weschke regularly visited Bessie Midgeley at Larchmount on London Road, Saffron Walden with other POWs and she encouraged his artistic talents. He painted scenery for the POW's theatrical performances. He became an art student at Cambridge using their studios to work on his sculpture and carvings. He later went to St. Martins, before abandoning sculpture for painting and found acclaim as a leading artist of the Cornish School. His obituary from February 2005 makes fascinating reading about his life and work.

The sculpture we hold is believed to have been given by Weschke as a leaving present to Kelvin Osborn, who was then the YMCA Welfare Officer at the Radwinter camp. Decades later, Osborn donated the sculpture (by which time Weschke was now a famous artist!) for fundraising to the Friend's School, Saffron Walden for an overseas development project they were undertaking. It was purchased by Jean Strachan for £20 in the 1960s and it was later used again in the 1980s for fundraising for one of the school's other overseas development projects, a water scheme in Bolivia. The item remained unsold, so the family put in the donation money themselves and retained the sculpture. The sculpture isn't something which would naturally be displayed in a family home as it is quite raw. The family (Jean & Doreen Strachan) eventually donated the sculpture to the Museum in 1984. A copy of Retallick's finished PhD thesis will be added to our collections for future researchers, once it is complete.

Bishop's Castle Coin Hoard & Discovery Channel filming

In mid-September Jenny Oxley was filmed by the Discovery Channel in the museum's local history gallery for a documentary series about historical mysteries. They were interested in finding out all about the Bishop's Castle Coin Hoard discovered in Shropshire. So what better time to revisit this bizarre and fascinating story....

In 2016, 913 gold sovereign and half-sovereign coins were discovered in Shropshire, hidden inside a piano, the piano which is now on display in the museum's Local History Gallery.

The piano was originally supplied by Beaven & Mothersole Piano Tuners, who were based in 27 West Road, Saffron Walden. If you come and visit and see the piano, you can see their name just above the keyboard. Receipts show that they had purchased the piano direct from the London manufacturers, Broadwood & Sons Ltd in 1906.



Nothing is then known about the history of the piano until it was purchased in 1983 from a house clearance company by the Hemmings family, residents of Saffron Walden. They owned the piano for 33 years, before moving to Shropshire and gifting it to their local college, The Community College, Bishop's Castle, completely unaware of what was hidden inside.

It was only when the piano was professionally tuned by a specialist piano technician, that the coins were finally discovered, nestled between the keys and the dust-board underneath.

The coins found date to between 1847 and 1915; so they originate from the reigns of Queen Victoria, King Edward VII and King George V. It is likely that they were concealed within the piano by a Saffron Walden resident. Some of the cardboard packaging in the pouches, which encased the coins, were taken from distinctive 1930s Shredded Wheat cereal boxes.



"The identity of the person who hid the coins and their precise motivation will probably remain a fascinating unanswered question" (Peter Reavill, Shropshire Finds Liaison Officer)

When the coins were discovered, they were declared treasure under the Treasure Act (1996), as they were gold coins which were deliberately hidden and no rightful heirs could be traced. At the time of its discovery, this hoard of modern gold coins was the largest of its type. 40 people came forward during the 3 month inquest to stake their claim on the coins, but none of them were found to be valid.



We are delighted that a representative sample of the gold coins, as well as their packaging and the piano in which they were hidden, were able to be acquired by the Museum as a result of a successful crowd-funding campaign and securing external grants. This fascinating mystery has captured many people's imaginations, having received local, regional and national news coverage. Stay tuned to our social media feeds to find out when the programme will be transmitted on the Discovery Channel.

Pacific Barkcloth Project

We're thrilled to be involved in an international project: "A Living Tradition: Expanding engagement with Pacific bark cloth" being led by the University of Glasgow. It includes a number of big project partner museums - the Horniman Museum & Gardens (London), Royal Albert Memorial Museum (Exeter), New Walk Museum & Art Gallery (Leicester), Royal Pavilion & Museums (Brighton), and National Museum of Scotland (Edinburgh). The team also includes two American Samoan bark cloth practitioners, Regina Meredith and Uilisone Fitiao, who have been actively involved in delivering workshops. The project is funded by an AHRB (Arts & Humanities Research Council) grant.

The museum holds a collection of around 80 bark cloth (Tapa) items, from the Pacific region, so this is a great opportunity to shed more light on the cultural traditions surrounding their production, design and use.

The Pacific region is the term for the area which covers Melanesia, Micronesia and Polynesia. So places like the Solomon Islands, Vanuatu, Kiribati, Samoa, the Cook Islands and Rarotonga. Tapa production has a very long tradition, though it started to disappear during the late 18th and early 19th centuries as it was replaced with woven cloth, but it is now being revived in Hawaii, Tonga, Samoa and Fiji. Tapa has also been made historically outside the Pacific area in parts of Africa, Southeast Asia and South America.

Tapa is made from the inner bark (bast) of paper mulberry, bread fruit or banyan trees, which are all members of the Moraceae (fig) family. Most bark cloth made in Polynesia is made from paper mulberry tree, which is native to South East Asia and there is genetic evidence now that it was carried from Taiwan and cultivated in plantations by early voyagers, who spread it throughout Polynesia.



Creating Tapa is a very complex process with around 10 stages in the production process. Basically, the inner bark is soaked and stretched. The raw material is beaten to open up the fibre structures. This brings each strip of inner bark into a suitable condition to become part of a finished cloth. The next stage is spreading and homogenisation, which aims to increase the surface area of the tapa until it reaches its greatest possible size without ripping or tearing it. It also aims to make the sheet's thickness as uniform and even as possible. It is then naturally dyed and hand-painted, printed or stencilled, to create often highly decorative Tapa. In the 18th and 19th centuries many of the designs were in the form of geometric patterns, but over time the patterns and designs have become more naturalistic.



Tapa was used widely for bedding, furnishings, structural dividers and for interior decoration in homes and ritual dwellings, as personal adornments, as ceremonial regalia at weddings, funerals, chiefly installations, milestone birthdays and exchange presentations, and are ritually sacred objects.

There are some great videos on YouTube which show the complex production process from beginning to end, which are well worth checking out, if you would like to find out more. It is believed that there are over 90 different variations in existence worldwide. There are examples which are 50ft long, such as Nagtu (Tongan bark cloth) which were historically made and continue to be made in large sheets so that they can be utilised for special occasions such as royal visits.

Object of the Month

Object of the Month – August 2020 Chinese Foot-Binding – Lotus Shoes



Foot-binding was a traditional practice that originated in 10th century China, among court dancers and high society women. By the 12th century it was a widespread practice. In the early 19th century it was estimated that five to eight women out of every ten in China (taking into account regional variations) had bound feet. It eventually spread through all social classes and while it was outlawed in 1912, it continued in some rural areas for years afterwards. A census taken in 1928 in rural Shanxi found that 18% of women had bound feet, while in some remote rural areas such as the Yunnan Province, foot-binding continued to be practiced until the 1950s. In most parts of China, the practice had virtually disappeared by 1949. In 1999, the last lotus shoe-making factory closed.

The museum has around 14 pairs of Chinese lotus shoes associated with foot binding. They typically have wedge heels, pointed upturned toes which extend beyond the sole and stiffened ankles. The embroidered uppers of the shoes have been beautifully crafted in silk and metallic threads, with embellishments – usually gold braid, beading and sequins.

The foot-binding practice involved plunging the feet into hot water and massaging them with oil. Then all the toes, except for the big ones, were broken and bound flat against the sole, to produce a triangular shape. The arch of the foot was strained as the foot was bent double. The feet were bound in place using a silk strip measuring 10ft long and 2 inches wide. These wrappings were briefly removed every 2 days to prevent blood and pus from infecting the foot. Sometimes “excess” flesh was cut away or encouraged to rot. Over time the wrappings became tighter and the shoes became smaller as the heel and sole were crushed together. After 2 years the process was complete and the feet were most probably numb, with a deep cleft in the sole that could hold a coin in place. Once a foot had been crushed and bound, the shape could not be reversed without undergoing the same pain all over again. This practice was usually undertaken on the feet of a young girl, aged between 3 and 11 years, as their feet would have been softer and easier to manipulate. It was usually carried out by the child’s grandmother.



This painful practice was associated with beauty, status and marriage eligibility. Having tiny feet was considered sexually attractive, emphasising a masculine Chinese view at that time of a woman’s inferiority and weakness. It was believed that girls who had their feet bound would be able to attract better marriage offers because of their tiny feet. In wealthy families, the feet of all the daughters would have been bound but in poorer families, the practice might only have been carried out on the eldest daughter, as they had the best chance of making a good marriage union. The ideal length of the foot – the “golden lotus” was deemed to be just three inches.

September 2020
Septarian Nodule
Chosen by Sarah Kenyon

September's 'Object of the Month' is part of a **Septarian Nodule**. It has been chosen by Sarah Kenyon, one of the Natural Sciences Officers at Saffron Walden Museum. The nodule came from the Kimmeridge Clay rock of Lincolnshire that formed 152-157 million years ago during the Upper Jurassic period. It was moved to Essex by the Anglian ice sheet which reached the county during an ice age glaciation 450,000 years ago. These boulders, transported long distances by ice and left behind when the ice melted, are called glacial erratics. The rocks are often very different from our local geology. This section was cut from a septarian nodule during the nineteenth century, between 1800 and 1899, and one side was polished. The polished and rough surfaces of the section show the calcite that has filled in the cracks within the grey clay of the cementstone nodule. The angular cracks which formed as the clay dried out are called septa. There were two phases of calcite mineral deposition. The dark brown bands of calcite were deposited by water rich in iron. The lighter calcite was deposited at a later time by water that did not contain iron. This septarian nodule section is in storage at the Museum Store in Saffron Walden.



Septarian nodule section showing grey clay with brown and yellow calcite septa

You can see a large septarian nodule in the Museum grounds with a display of other glacial erratics. The boulder weighs two tonnes! It was carried to Saffron Walden from east Yorkshire by the Anglian ice sheet and was found when digging the foundations of the former Acrow (Engineers) Ltd factory on Ashdon Road, Saffron Walden.

Septarian nodule boulder on display in the Museum grounds

Another polished section of a septarian nodule is on display in the centre of the Geology gallery.



Septarian nodule section on display in the Geology gallery



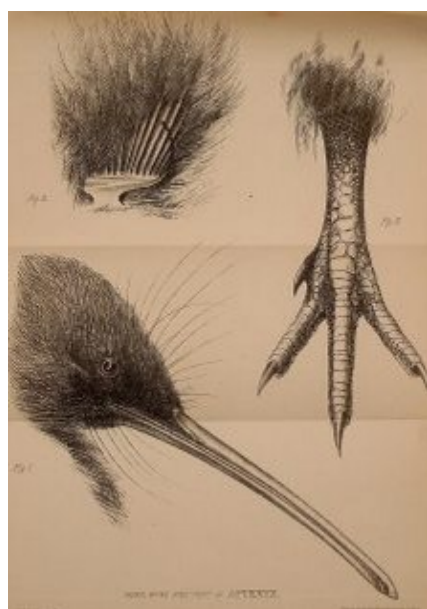
A limestone septarian nodule with large septa of yellow calcite crystals.

October 2020
Little Spotted Kiwi
Chosen by James Lumbard

October's Object of the Month has been chosen by James Lumbard, one of our Natural Sciences Officers.

He has been busy over the last few weeks moving the bird taxidermy from a temporary home back to their usual store. October's object of the month is therefore a mounted kiwi skin, probably of a little spotted kiwi, the smallest of the five kiwi species.

With strong, heavy legs and no wings, kiwis have evolved for life on the ground. They are nocturnal, dig burrows to nest in, and have stiff, hair-like outer feathers to withstand pushing through leaves and twigs. Unlike most birds they have keen hearing and a good sense of smell to help them find food, mostly earthworms and insects.



The little spotted kiwi in Saffron Walden Museum. © SWM

Kiwis have 'whiskers' around their beak, stiff feathers and tiny wings, and strong feet for digging.

[Internet Archive Book Images / No restrictions]

Kiwi numbers have plummeted since Europeans arrived in New Zealand, bringing rats, stoats, pigs, cats, dogs, trophy hunting and habitat destruction. Kiwis grow and reproduce slowly and only thrive today on protected reserves, with intensive work to remove these threats. The indigenous Maori regard the kiwi as a *taonga* (treasure), and

actively protect the birds across 230,000 hectares of land, about the same area as the national government's Department of Conservation. Altogether, an area of land bigger than Essex is managed for kiwi conservation.

More information

New Zealand Department of Conservation (DoC) – Facts about kiwi:
<https://www.doc.govt.nz/nature/native-animals/birds/birds-a-z/kiwi/facts/>
New Zealand DoC – Little Spotted Kiwi:

<https://www.doc.govt.nz/nature/native-animals/birds/birds-a-z/kiwi/little-spotted-kiwi/>

New Zealand DoC – Kiwi: <https://www.doc.govt.nz/nature/native-animals/birds/birds-a-z/kiwi/>

Science Learning Hub – Conserving our native kiwi:

<https://www.sciencelearn.org.nz/resources/2784-conserving-our-native-kiwi>

WWF New Zealand – Kiwi:

https://www.wwf.org.nz/what_we_do/species/kiwi/



Light green, current location of kiwis; Dark green, location of kiwis before European colonisation; Dark grey, kiwis never known here. [© New Zealand Department of Conservation]

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Internet Archive Book Images. 'Features of kiwis' Transactions and proceedings of the New Zealand Institute (1870). Internet Archive Book Images / No restrictions. Available from commons.wikimedia.org [Accessed 29.9.2020]

Michal Klajban. 'Apteryx owenii – distribution map. CC BY-SA (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/4.0>). Available from commons.wikimedia.org [Accessed 29.9.2020]

New Zealand Department of Conservation. Kiwi Recovery Plan Summary Document 2018-2028. New Zealand Government, 2018. Available from <https://www.doc.govt.nz/nature/native-animals/birds/birds-a-z/kiwi/docs-work/> [Accessed 29.9.2020]

Object of the Month

November 2020

Chosen By : Carolyn Wingfield

Late Iron Age Butt Beaker

Our Object of the Month for November has been chosen by Carolyn Wingfield, Curator. It is a late Iron Age beaker, imported from Gaul (France) and buried with its owner around the time of the Roman conquest of Britain in AD 43.

Beakers like this were the fashionable drinking vessels of the day for wine or beer. This beaker is 26 cms tall and is 20 cms across at its widest point. Its capacity is roughly 4 litres or 7 pints. Vessels like this may have been passed round at a feast or ceremony, so that does not necessarily represent one person's intake of drink!

Discovery of an Iron Age Community

In 1992, archaeologists discovered traces of an Iron Age settlement to the east of Bishop's Stortford, in Birchanger parish. Excavations took place before the area was developed as Woodside Industrial Park. They found sherds of pottery, animal bones and features in the soil which showed that a small community was living there in the early and mid Iron Age, from around 700 BC to 100 BC.

There then seems to have been a break in occupation for at least a hundred years, until the early 1st century AD, shortly before the Roman invasion of AD 43. Around that time, an important member of the local Iron Age community died and was cremated. Their burial with pottery and other grave goods was the outstanding find of the excavation. Occupation of the site lasted into the early Roman period until about AD 150.

The Burial

To prepare for the burial, the Iron Age community dug a large circular pit, a little over a metre in diameter. In this they placed eight pottery vessels (including this beaker), four bronze brooches, a leg of pork and a pig's head, cut in two length-ways. It is likely that some of the pots held other food and drink to complete the feast for the afterlife. The ashes of the dead may have been placed in a cloth bag or wooden container which did not survive. Analysis of the cremated bone remains indicated that one individual, probably an adult, was buried.

The bronze brooches were all common types used to fasten clothes in the late Iron Age and early Roman period. They were in poor and incomplete condition so cannot be displayed, but the illustrations below are of similar brooches.



Posh Pottery imported from Gaul

The pottery can tell us much about the status of the person buried. The number of pots in the burial (eight) suggests that this was a fairly wealthy person. Also, they owned fine pottery imported from abroad and probably only available to higher-ranking people in Iron Age society.

This beaker is of fine white sandy clay and was made in north Gaul (France). The burial also included another beaker, red in colour, from Gaul. There were strong links between the late Iron Age peoples of Gaul and south-east Britain, as attested by many archaeological finds such as pottery and coins, and by Roman writers. The pots also included a platter and a cup, both made locally but copying the style of imported wares from Gaul.

The other four pots on the burial – a flagon, a cup, a second platter and a small jar – were all types of local pot known from the Essex – Hertfordshire region.

Pigs and Burials

The Birchanger Iron Age burial shares similarities with other Iron Age sites excavated at Stansted Airport and at Strood Hall in Little Canfield parish which lies near the former Roman Road Stane Street (now B 1256, formerly A120). Two late Iron Age cremation burials at the Duckend Farm Site, Stansted Airport also contained pigs' heads. Pigs or wild boar were significant animals in Iron Age culture and myth, so perhaps the pig remains were more than just food offerings.

Want to know more?

See the full report of the excavation at Birchanger "Iron Age and Roman material from Birchanger, near Bishop's Stortford; excavations at Woodside Industrial Park, 1992" by Maria Medlycott, published in Essex Archaeology and History volume 25 (1994), pages 28 – 45.

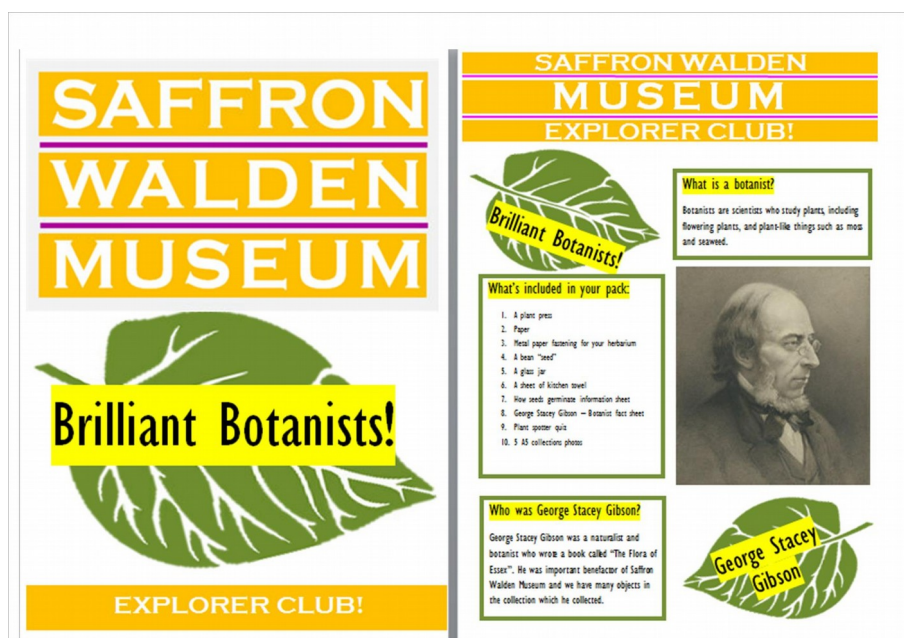
The finds and records from this site are held by Saffron Walden Museum and can be studied by appointment (access subject to Covid 19 regulations).

The Gibson Library (formerly Saffron Walden Town Library) is an excellent resource for local history and archaeology publications. For information on how to use the Gibson Library visit their website <https://gibsonlibrary.org.uk>

Learning at Saffron Walden Museum: Charlotte Pratt

Museum Activity Packs, Activity Packs for Children (and Grannies)

Whilst the Museum has been closed Activity Packs were made available for collection; this is an example from the Brilliant Botanists pack.



One Granni sent this letter;

All praise for the children's Museum Activity Packs that were put together this Summer.

I first ordered Brilliant Botanists for my two grandsons..4 & 7.. Two wonderful brown paper bags full of excitement were waiting for collection. A beautifully coloured A4 booklet .. Instructions and illustrations; wonderful photos from GSGs Herbarium and cardboard, wood and coach bolts!

Granni... It's engineering, said the 4 year old. They loved the Amazon and Coca Cola cardboard, jam jar, kitchen paper and runner beans seeds.

Having bolted their presses together they were excited to become plant hunters and forage along the Battle Ditches and into Audley End fields ... their first outing with me since lockdown. Plant material collected (in the carrier bag ...beware nettles!) and put in the press (not a namby pamby flower press) ...they were collecting for a Herbarium!

The following day the beans were carefully arranged in the jam jars (a little learning about dicotyledonous seeds. Watch for the shoot going upwards and the root going down) and the pressed specimens were mounted into a collection ..all to take back home and share with Mum and Dad. The beans were duly planted and produced a fine crop towards the end of summer, and the 4 year old had learnt a very grown up word 'herbarium'.

A quick phone call to fellow grandparents saw Charlotte's amazing activity bags travelling to Cambridge, Kent, Herefordshire and Roehampton...as well as other eager purchasers in Saffron Walden!

One 6 year old exclaimed "this is real newspaper, Nan-man" on looking into her bag!
"I want to make the flapping bird...and find out about the mechanics" said a 7yr old.
As for the clay and a real fragment of Roman pottery ... with its accession number! I'm afraid it was too much for one of my friends who didn't really want to have to pass it on to her granddaughter!

In the past I've taken the boys to the summer museum activity sessions ... But these lovely bags surpass them! They are Blue Peter on steroids! Completely self-contained and portable. A great big thank you to all involved for having made life so much easier for Grannies who have been supporting their families in these tough times.

Museum Shop Focus: Wendy-Jo Atter

Museum-commissioned Jigsaw puzzles make excellent Christmas gifts as:

- They appeal to both young and old (they can be completed by age 8 and above)
- They are under £10, being priced at the very reasonable cost of just £7.50 each
- With 40 pieces and a very neat small square box, their size makes them ideal stocking fillers or under the tree gifts.

Here is some more information about what makes them so appealing:

- **Original and unique to Saffron Walden Museum** – the puzzle features an image from our British Butterfly Collection.
- **Whimsy Shapes** - an Historical Link to Victorian Puzzle Making - Quirky and delightful, they're a twist to the usual jigsaw as they incorporate whimsy pieces. 'Whimsies', which are essentially a puzzle piece crafted into a recognisable shape (in the case of the Museum Puzzle these are 2 x Butterflies and 3 x Flowers), are an historical link to the Victorian puzzle-making past. As the name suggests, the original Victorian puzzle cutters added the individual pieces on a whim and so the term 'whimsy' was born.



- **Irregular Puzzle Pieces** – the irregular pieces create a more dynamic and challenging puzzling experience. They have been cut by precision laser to ensure that these intricate puzzle pieces fit together perfectly.
- **Elegantly Crafted British Classic** - made in the heart of the Wiltshire countryside they represent the very best of British materials and craftsmanship.
- **Wooden Jigsaw Puzzles** - the wood used is derived from sustainable sources.
- **Shop with a Conscience** – every purchase actively contributes to Saffron Walden Museum's future sustainability and success. What better way to give back at Christmas?

Volunteer News: Wendy-Jo Atter



Congrats, Saffron Walden Museum, you're a 2020 Travellers' Choice Winner



Congratulations Saffron Walden Museum on being a Travellers' Choice Winner. Each year, Tripadvisor combs through reviews, ratings, and saves from Travellers everywhere, and uses that info to award the very best. You're part of an exclusive group, and we want to help you celebrate (and promote) this major accomplishment.

You're in the top 10% of attractions worldwide.

Museum Society News

Membership

I am delighted that Catherine Peacock has volunteered to take over as Membership Secretary and has written the pen portrait below. I am sure that we all hope that she will enjoy being more involved in the Museum Society and meeting many members - when Covid permits!

It is good to know that I can leave Membership in a very capable pair of hands

Christine Sharpe

Catherine writes:-

I was lucky enough to grow up in a Victorian house overlooking the remains of Bedford Castle. Castle Gardens had evolved into a park from the private grounds surrounding the family home of 19th-century brewer, Cecil Higgins. Bedford Museum sat on the edge of Castle Gardens and the former Higgins family home had become an art gallery. On wet days, my brother and I spent many hours amongst the glass-cased eclectic exhibits in both the museum and art gallery. Memorable items, amongst others, arrow heads and pottery from the castle site, a Georgian shop front and wooden drain (a hollowed out tree trunk) saved from the High Street, an ornate William Burges bed, a display of Bedfordshire Lace and an Egyptian mummy case. These inspiring visits helped to bring a tangible, chronological sense to my lessons at school and kindled what was to become an enduring interest in the

past. As an adult I have come to recognise what wonderful treasure houses our museums are, both small and large, and feel very pleased that I am now able to contribute some form of support to my new local museum.

A little more about me: On leaving school I trained as a nurse. I have worked in both acute hospital and general practice roles before moving to university medical administration, firstly for the Open University and then the University of Cambridge. More recently, I have changed career direction to follow my other great interest, old buildings, and I work today in an administrative role on a part-time basis for the Society for the Protection of Ancient Buildings. I now live in Ickleton with my exuberant terrier, Piglet.

Reports on Talks and Events

Bird Migration - a talk by Liz Huxley using Zoom Tuesday 13th October 2020

Liz opened her talk by describing the varieties of bird migrations; those of residents within the U.K., summer visitors, winter visitors, passage migrants, partial migrants and vagrants. Some will fly over water and others, where they can, use routes over land, some migrate by night – possibly using stars to navigate by – and some by day or, non-stop, by both. As to vagrants, they are the rarities, usually blown off course, that have Twitchers out in force.

It tends to be the insect feeders that head south, some ducks, geese and waders and some of the thrushes – fieldfares and redwings – who arrive from the north. Knot arrive in very large numbers, well over 100,000, and occupy areas such as The Wash with its well-stocked mud flats, Arctic terns are summer visitors to the U.K. from late spring and breeding here as well as much further north. The start their winter migration south to southern Africa and Antarctica in October.

For sea birds, spring sees passage migrants e.g. arctic skuas and gannets, some of the latter may nest here on coasts. Another U.K. summer breeder, Manx shearwater, nests in colonies in burrows that they visit at night, raising offspring before leaving for winter feeding grounds further south. We also see the return of common terns, puffins, guillemots and kittiwakes to breed; these last 3 leave at the end of July to go sea faring again but the terns hang on till early Autumn.

Spring also sees some wintering waders, spotted redshank and most wood sandpipers for instance, return to their breeding grounds further north as passage migrants and within the U.K. many curlews return to the moors, merlins that have overwintered in the south migrate to wilder country in northern England and Scotland and short-eared owls move to the coast and many others of them migrate back to parts of Northern Europe to spend the summer. Inward migration starts in about March with e.g. chiffchaff, spotted flycatcher and willow warbler and gathers pace in April with cuckoo, swallow and martin and whinchat and many more with swift in May. Some other of our resident populations are swollen by species that have wintered across The Channel, blackbirds for instance.

We have learnt much about migration habits by using several kinds of ringing and now by satellite tracking. Sometimes birds are trapped under mist nets and if already ringed, details taken or, if not, ringed and recorded. Such birds would include reed warblers, nightingales, wrens from northern Europe and turtle doves. Waders' rings are larger for e.g. avocets and black-tailed godwits which are ringed on the right leg whereas bar-tailed are on the left leg. Bigger birds, such as ospreys have bigger rings and the brent geese at Blue House Farm in Essex have radio collars and capercaillies in Scotland are followed by radio tracking. Using satellite tracking a honey buzzard was recorded as flying 10,000 kms in 42 days from its Scandinavian breeding grounds to winter in South Africa, passing through the U.K. in Autumn. Sometimes if migrations are weather dependent, birds will gather and wait until it is favourable – so check the relevant forecasts before going out to observe.

Landings vary; in autumn in North Scotland some swans and geese make landfall, rest and feed up and then move on to their winter grounds. In spring the west and south coasts and the Scilly Isles can be witness to a 'fall' of migrants when flocks of overnight flyers find land and weak, hungry, thirsty and tired they appear to 'fall' out of the sky. Once recovered they move on to their preferred breeding grounds.

This is only a resumé of Liz's highly detailed talk which was helpfully illustrated by charts and maps showing routes and areas of breeding etc. and pictures of birds. The errors in these notes are mine. Before taking questions, Liz finished on a picture of a fully fledged robin whose numbers, too, are increased by continentals at this time of year.

Heather Salvidge

Museum Society Talks Resume by Zoom

After our "trial run" last month, when Liz Huxley gave a Zoom talk on Bird Migration, we are now in a position to resume our talks programme by Zoom. All talks will begin at 8:00 p.m.

On Monday 7 December, Honor Ridout will talk on The Rise, Fall and Triumph of Father Christmas (aka Santa Claus).

On Monday 18 January, Jennifer Rowland will talk on John Ray, Father of Natural History.

On Monday 8 February Tony Kirby will talk on Market Towns 1750 to the Present.

We will circulate the log on details nearer the time of the talks to all our members who have given us email contact details. We realise that this excludes members who are not on the internet and we are sorry for this. If we do not have your email address, it may be that you have arrangements in place that enable you to join Zoom meetings. In that case, if you get in touch with me on 01279 814153, we will make sure that you get the log on details as well.

Paul Salvidge

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 . . .

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