



Museum Matters

Newsletter of Saffron Walden Museum Society Ltd

Spring 2021 Issue 53

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Highlights and Happenings; From the Chairman

I am sorry to have to begin this note with the news of the sudden death of John Bullen. He was such a lovely man, always getting on with his role in the Society and not expecting praise. He will be very much missed. It will not be the same getting a drink without his friendly manner handing over a glass. Our thoughts are with Janet during this difficult time for her. They were both active for over forty years! You will find further contributions from members in this newsletter.

Despite the most recent "lock down", we successfully held the Annual General Meeting in November by email and post. All the officers were re-elected to serve for a further year. At the Board meeting in January, we agreed to appoint two Vice-Chairmen (Keith Eden in addition to Paul Salvidge) to assist in the preparation for the work required in the re-development and also the appointment of a new chairman at the next AGM. Having been on the Management Committee of the old Society since April 1971 and the Chairman of the new Society since 2008 I feel that I should pass the baton to someone able to take the Society through the next years of re-development.

We received the report from Julia Holbery Associates on audience development in December and are now in the final phase of consultancy into fund raising. The Board had an extended meeting in January to discuss the requirements of the Society in the re-development of the Museum and its effect on the work load of directors. We have decided to recruit at least two new Directors to cover fundraising and legal matters and are aware of the potential retirement of two directors in the near future. Further news will be published in June. The Board have given the Development Committee the task of preparing the next stage which will involve the preparation of a business plan and a detailed set of plans for the present Museum Building. We have indicated a cap of three and a half million pounds which includes the half million the society has already reserved for future development. There are a number of options included in the two reports which all have to be considered and refined into one practical plan. Consultation with members, staff and the District Council will follow later this year.

I referred to the Zoom talks in the last newsletter and we have now held a total of four this season. They have proved to be so popular that the Board are looking to see if we can continue with an "on line" view when talks resume in the usual manner later this year. Again, our thanks to Paul Salvidge in finding "zoom" speakers and to Richard Priestley who has taken on the role of host.

I have only been able to visit the Museum twice in the last year! I did, however, manage to collect the various collection of old files with covers falling apart and hand written minutes books, which I have now been able to collate and file in new file boxes. These contain all the minutes from 1958 to 2008 of the Old Society, Saffron Walden Museum Society, and from 2008 up to date for the new Society, Saffron Walden Museum Society Limited. This will make the archive much more accessible for staff and the society. We are also starting to record the new Society minutes "digitally" and in due course we will try to digitise the old society minutes. As we approach fifty years of the partnership agreement with Uttlesford District Council in April 2025 these minutes will be a valuable resource in recording the history of the partnership.

There is now hope that the Museum may be able to re-open in May and we hope to hold this years AGM, in the Museum, on the 22nd October next. I look forward to being able to meet you all in person soon.

Tony Watson

Recollections of John Bullen

Our long-standing volunteer John Bullen recently passed away, and we send our condolences to Janet. Some of the Museum's other volunteers and members of staff have sent their recollections of John:

Len Pole:

John Bullen was a constant presence when help was needed in running events and moving items in the 1980s and before - his assistance goes back as long as Janet's, I think as far back as the mid 1970s. He could be relied upon to turn up at short notice to help when needed, as well as being very useful in running the more regular Society events.

Maureen Evans:

John and Janet have both been involved with the museum for well over 40 years - perhaps even before Len's time. Janet was initially involved with conservation in the 1980's as far as I can recall - working alongside Louise Bacon (the first ever conservator) . One of the jobmaster's carts they worked on, then displayed in the Audley End stable block, had a family connection with Janet. The jobmaster's cart, has since been transferred to Burwell Museum, due to lack of space at Saffron Walden.

John was always 'around' too, always genial and supportive in many ways including his photographic expertise. He had no specific regular role but definitely enjoyed bar-tending at Society events, and helping out at innumerable Museum Society and fundraising events. Most recently for me, he and Janet helped out with the book sale in the then school room a while back - and at the end John toted carrier bags full of surplus books off to assorted charity shops around the town.

We really enjoyed John's input into a rather jolly exhibition we did called The Jukebox Generation covering 50s/60s. Janet produced some of her clothing from the time; Jenny and David Gibsons loaned a jukebox; friends of mine provided a motorbike and leathers, and a poster of the Isle of Wight festival - and John lent us his immaculate (presumably conscripted?) RAF uniform. It was fitted onto a rather camp looking male mannequin we had borrowed, so a boot and a shoe brush were placed on each hand to lend a more military bearing. The family maintained proud links to the service. Their (late) daughter joined the RAF and married one of the Red Arrows team and , as you know, donations in his memory can be directed to The Royal Airforce Benevolent Fund c/o Peasgood & Skeates.

In my mind they have always been an inseparable Janet- and- John double act.



Lynn Morrison:

I remember John mainly as an unflappable and kindly barman who didn't mind finishing up a bottle in the direction of my wine glass - better than wasting it - at the end of a social evening. We talked about Australia, travelling and cruises. I'm sure he thoroughly enjoyed his life.

He also discussed with me the merits of Araldite and provided much information, and data sheets, as he used to work in the Ciba Geigy resin factory, and they produced different kinds which were used in conservation. He was a great photographer, though he shocked me by saying he disposed of his photographic prints after their display at the Camera Club exhibitions. When the switch from film cameras to digital came, I was very reluctant and discussed the pros and cons with John. He was very encouraging and digital took over at the museum.

Bruce Tice:

I remember John as being an affable and, together with Janet, an ever-dependable presence at Museum events. I don't think that he ever had an 'official' volunteering role, however he often pitched in to help with whatever was going on. He was especially knowledgeable about timber and timber crafts. He was a member of something (and I can't recall the exact name) like the Wood Industries Forum and I recall him organising trips for some of the members of that group to look at items in the Museum collections.

He was also most helpful when I moved the Museum's agricultural collections from the store and stable block at Audley End during the winter of 1995. In those days, the storeroom (under the gardener's flat in the stable block) resembled something more akin to Tutankhamun's tomb than to an ordered museum store. Things were piled everywhere in dusty heaps, there was precious little by way of documentation and every now and again an object would yield up the desiccated corpse of a mouse or bird. John was a fund of knowledge on what some of the more obscure objects might be and I recall with particular vividness his description of watching, as a young boy, his grandfather making coffins from elm boards and then sealing the insides with hot pitch so as to make them 'watertight'. Janet's family also had a connection with the owners of the jobmaster's wagon.

John had worked for CIBA-Geigy at Duxford (the so-called "home of Araldite resins for adhesives") and one of his last jobs there was to oversee the dismantling of the labs. He kindly arranged for the Museum to have access to anything we wanted. Over a few days we went back and forth from Duxford with a hired van helping ourselves to shelving, small cupboards, timber and anything else that seemed like it could come in handy for either displays or stores. This must have been sometime in late 1998 or early 1999, as at one point he presented me with an industrial sign warning people of loud noises in the vicinity saying I might need it soon. This was just before Henrietta was born and it was a gesture typical of John. Luckily, there were only a few occasions on which Henrietta used her baby lungs to full capacity but for a number of years the sign hung on the wall of her bedroom just in case.

Curator's Column

Looking Ahead

The government has given a provisional date for re-opening museums from Monday 17 May. If this timetable is not delayed, Saffron Walden Museum hopes to open its doors from Thursday 20 May subject to confirmation, and we look forward to seeing our much-missed volunteers and weekend staff colleagues. Museum Society members will be told as soon as we are able to confirm re-opening arrangements! Our Front-of-House and Admin Officer Wendy-Jo Atter has been striving to resolve remaining issues with the new till, card reader and scanner, which were successfully tested during our short spell of re-opening before Christmas. We also expect to have the old gas boilers replaced before we re-open, and a more efficient heating system as a result.

Behind closed doors we seem to be busier than ever, not least because we have now launched into the last phase of our National Lottery Heritage Fund 'Resilient Heritage' project and appointed Caroline Taylor Consulting Ltd as our fund-raising advisor. Caroline will be guiding our Fund-Raising Committee (Keith Eden, Christine Sharpe, Jenny Oxley and me) through the production of a fund raising-strategy to help us achieve our plans for the Museum.

We look forward to welcoming visitors back, but there are also many questions about the year ahead. Will patterns of visiting change for museums? Will we be able to resume the popular activities and events like we did before, or will there be a greater emphasis on providing on-line services and outdoor activities? Please visit our

website www.saffronwaldenmuseum.org if would like to contribute to our CV Walden project, which is recording local residents' reactions to the pandemic, or investigate our new Learning Hub. Above all, we hope to see you in person before too long!

Carolyn

Natural Sciences: Sarah Kenyon

After the excitement of opening the museum to visitors before Christmas, and the joy of seeing some familiar faces, it was back to the disappointment of our 3rd national Covid-19 lockdown in January 2021. The guidance is to work from home where possible. However I need a computer workstation, with various bits of equipment, so we have relocated to the Museum Store again where it is quieter and there is more room for social distancing. Here is my personalised work space at the store. Unfortunately it was the coldest January since 2010. The low temperatures and snow continued into February so I keep a portable oil-filled radiator by my side when I am at the computer. Fiona can work on her laptop in the kitchen where the heating can be turned up higher. In the store this makes the air too dry for the collections.



Fiona is cleaning the natural sciences store again. It is surprising how much dust and dirt has accumulated over the last year with the store being occupied by more people for longer periods of time. Another project at the store is to record details of the British birds' eggs stored in historic wooden cabinets. The largest collection was donated by William Tuke, the brother in law of George Stacey Gibson. The species of birds and number of eggs present in each drawer are being listed so the object records can be updated on the Modes database.



We've completed another check for insect pests that eat museum collections and put down new sticky traps for 2021. Specialist contractors also finished the work to seal asbestos minerals into Perspex boxes. Now they can be accessed safely for research and display.

This sample of riebeckite, known as blue asbestos, was collected in South Africa. It is on display in the geology gallery at the Museum.

Out and about, the verge volunteers helped to check that the special roadside verges all had their full width cuts in October and November 2020. The verge site at Little Chesterford will be studied this year to research the life cycle of the rare and declining Liquorice Piercer moth,

which has only been recorded at three sites in Essex. The pupa of the moth has not been described and the pupation site is not known. It might be in the seed pods of its food plant Wild Liquorice or in the soil near the plant. To find out more visit <https://butterfly-conservation.org/moths/liquorice-piercer> and <https://www.essexfieldclub.org.uk/portal/p/Species+Account/s/Grapholita+pallifrontana>

Before we left the Museum we produced a new temporary sign for the rocks and coffins on display in the Museum grounds. The old sign was out of date and hard to read because some of the letters had peeled off. The new sign will help you to identify the glacial erratic boulders if you are out for a walk in Saffron Walden this Spring.

Sarah Kenyon

Natural Sciences: James Lombard

A century of wildlife photography

While researching and writing a talk for Epping Forest District Museum, I came across some amazing parallels of wildlife photography from the Museum's collections. In 1885, some intrepid wildlife enthusiasts and early conservationists were taking photos of the seabirds at the Farne Islands and Bass Rock. The Museum is also very honoured to care for the photography collection of local wildlife enthusiast and conservationist Barry Kaufmann-Wright, whose photos of seabirds on the Farne Islands were taken at least 100 years later. These photos show gannets, but text accompanying another 1885 image of kittiwakes reads: 'Those who rejoice in the happiness of the birds of heaven must feel pleasure in the knowledge that the "Sea Bird Preservation Act" stopped that senseless destruction to which these harmless birds were exposed'. The talk is titled 'Barry Kaufmann-Wright: The Wildlife Man' and will be delivered online on Thursday 15th April. Details on how to watch can be found on the Epping Forest District Museum website.



Gannet on Bass Rock, 1885.



Gannet taken by Barry Kaufmann-Wright

Collections and research

We're pleased to say that the Museum's natural sciences collections are still contributing to active research despite our continued closure. The Natural Sciences Officers have responded to requests for information and advice on projects including: research into the UK extinction and reintroduction of the chequered skipper butterfly; research on the life cycle of the liquorice piercer moth on Uttlesford's special roadside verges; a study on the welfare of parrots kept in captivity; and wax models of fungi to inform an artistic project. Where appropriate, we ask for the Museum to be credited and request access to the final product to reference in the Museum's documentation.



Drawer of butterflies, with chequered skippers on the right

We have also sent a comprehensive summary of the natural sciences collections to the Natural Sciences Collections Association to contribute to their 'Natural History Near You' initiative, where potential visitors and researchers can find details of museums and other organisations across the country which hold natural sciences collections for public and academic use.

Digital environmental monitoring trial

The trial of the new digital data logger which records temperature and relative humidity (environmental conditions), to investigate the possibility of upgrading from mechanical thermohygrographs (THGs), has come to an end. The trial has shown several benefits of the data logger over THGs. Live alerts, when properly set, can allow faster responses to potentially urgent collections care issues. More data is collected with less effort, which gives a better understanding of the average environmental conditions, allowing better control in those areas which have temperature or humidity control. In areas without such controls, the information collected will build a baseline of knowledge which can help plan where improvements or adjustments to current practices may be needed.

James Lombard

Object of the Month

January 2021

Snowdrops

Chosen By Sarah Kenyon



Snowdrops from Littlebury in Essex are January's 'Object of the Month'. The snowdrops were collected by George Stacey Gibson in a meadow at Littlebury in March 1864, so these preserved plants are 156 years old.

Herbarium

Specimens of these snowdrops are preserved in Saffron Walden Museum's herbarium collection of dried plants. The herbarium contains plant specimens collected by botanists in Essex and it is now more accessible at the new museum store. The collection is an invaluable record of the plants found in this region and has been used to produce Floras for Essex and Cambridgeshire.



To preserve the plants they were pressed, dried and mounted on a paper herbarium sheet. The plant name, the location where it was found, the name of the collector and the date were written on the sheet, or a label which is fixed to the sheet. Each herbarium sheet represents a biological record of where a plant species was found at a particular time.

Flora



A Flora is a book that describes the plants that grow in a geographical area and records where they are found at a certain time. Research using the Museum herbarium has plotted how the number of plant species and the distribution of plants have changed over time because of habitat loss, changes in management of the countryside and pollution. The Museum's copy of the Flora of Essex by George Stacey Gibson, 1862, includes so many beautiful coloured illustrations of plants from English Botany by James Sowerby (1757-1822) that it has expanded to six volumes which are each bound in green leather.

This is an illustration of Snowdrop, *Galanthus nivalis*, from volume five of the Museum's copy of his flora.



The snowdrops were chosen by Sarah Kenyon, one of the Natural Sciences Officers at the Museum. These beautiful little plants produce their white flowers from January to March and they signify that spring is on its way. Snowdrops grow at the entrance to the Museum on Museum Street. We look forward to welcoming you back to Saffron Walden Museum in 2021.

February 2021
Water Vole
Chosen by James Lombard

February's Object of the Month has been chosen by James Lombard (one of our Natural Sciences Officers) and is a water vole.

Described as "Britain's fastest-declining mammal", the water vole disappeared from over 90% of its range between the 1950s and 1990s.

Water voles are about the same size as a brown rat, but with a furry, much shorter tail, and small ears. Today, they are a semi-aquatic mammal, relying heavily on streams and rivers for food and shelter – they use their teeth to dig burrows into steep banks to shelter and raise their young.



Water vole © Saffron Walden Museum.

Do water voles need water?

But it wasn't always this way. They don't show any of the usual adaptations for a water-based mammal, such as webbed feet and a 'keeled' tail (flattened sideways but taller top-to-bottom), both of which make otters very strong swimmers.

In the 1500s, rewards for hunting 'rats' may actually have referred to 'water voles' that lived entirely on land. Their burrowing habits and herbivorous diet would have made them an agricultural pest, which would explain the rewards paid for hunting them. Modern water voles are always found on waterways, so any hunting must have succeeded in wiping out fully-terrestrial water voles.

A population vole-ercoaster

In the 1990s and early 2000s, the number of water voles in the UK plummeted, making them Britain's fastest-declining mammal. Surveys of water vole territories in Essex showed that 81% of recent territories were still occupied in 1990, but by 2005, only 7.5% of territories were still occupied in certain areas.

Such a drastic decline couldn't just be down to habitat loss, and they are resistant to pollution – water vole colonies live in the banks of streams which run from landfill sites along the Thames estuary, and on rubbish-choked streams near Rainham.

Studies by Essex Wildlife Trust showed that crashes in water vole numbers closely followed local increases in the number the invasive American mink. These animals are not native to the UK, and became established after escaping or being released from fur farms from the 1950s onwards. Mink will hunt water voles in their burrows and in water, and a female can destroy a water vole colony in one breeding season. The water vole's usual predators only hunt on land, and are too big to fit in their burrows.

Essex Wildlife Trust began work in 2007 to control mink numbers in key water vole strongholds, allowing water voles to recover, and spread. In 2012, more areas were put under mink control, and water vole colonies were relocated from sites destroyed by development along the Thames and M25. Surveys in 2013 showed that these colonies had survived and spread, with several new colonies established along the river Colne and its tributaries.



American mink. © Saffron Walden Museum.

Ratty's new best friends

Since 2000, wildlife surveys have found an ever-increasing number of polecats, a native predator which had been extinct in Essex for over 100 years. Polecats were hunted to near extinction across the UK by gamekeepers, who treated them as dangerous vermin, and they were also easily caught and killed in rabbit traps, which fell out of use in the 1950s. Polecats have probably spread into Essex from a targeted release in Hertfordshire in 1982-3.



Natural Sciences Officer, James Lumbard, with the skin of a recently-mounted polecat. The polecat was brought to the Museum after being found dead at the roadside. Image © Saffron Walden Museum.



Otter © Saffron Walden Museum. This otter is on view in the Victorian Museum Workroom display when the Museum is open.

Informal tracking and recording also suggests that the return of polecats may be helping water voles spread and recover more quickly, by reducing mink numbers. The same is true for otters, which are now returning to Essex, after being declared locally extinct in 1986. Both of these animals are native predators that rarely hunt water voles, but will compete with the American mink for food and territory, and are also big enough to hunt or kill mink. There are no studies to confirm it yet, but it could be very good news for water voles, and wildlife-lovers across Essex. Water voles can now be seen at Thaxted, and at Thorley Wash, Rushy Mead and Sawbridgeworth Marsh along the River Stort.

References

Are the otter and polecat combining to reduce mink numbers? East Anglian Daily Times, first published 31 March, 2019. Accessed 29.1.2021: <https://www.eadt.co.uk/news/business/rise-in-polecats-and-otters-hit-mink-2562736>

Mammals of Essex by John Dobson and Darren Tansley, 2014.

March 2021

Roman Seal Box

Chosen by Carolyn Wingfield

March's Object of the Month has been chosen by Carolyn Wingfield, our Museum Curator, it is a Roman seal box from Leaden Roding

How to send valuable items or sensitive documents securely by courier is an age-old concern. The Roman Empire thrived on its communication networks, and this small bronze seal box from Leaden Roding provides an insight into the transport of goods and letters in Britain, nearly 2,000 years ago.

The seal box was given to the Museum in 2013 as part of a generous donation of finds and records from an archaeological researcher and detectorist. Finds of seal boxes are reasonably common, but often only the lids which survive, and complete examples are relatively scarce. They date from the late 1st to 3rd centuries AD.



The box measures 20 x 17 mm and the hinged lid is decorated with a lattice diamond pattern inlaid with red and blue enamel. Seal boxes were made in a variety of shapes, round, diamond-shaped and leaf-shaped being more common in Roman Britain than square ones.

To secure a packet of letters or valuable goods, the sender tied fine cord round the packet and through the holes in the base and sides of the seal box, fastening it tightly. The cords were knotted inside the box and melted wax was poured in, covering the knotted cord. The sender could personalise the seal by stamping the wax with their signet ring. If the seal was broken or the cord cut in transit, it would be obvious to the recipient on delivery.

We can only speculate on the sort of items which would need to be sealed: perhaps small bundles of writing tablets containing important or sensitive correspondence, or purses of gold coins or other small valuables. Leaden Roding parish, where our seal box was found, lies on the route of the Roman road from Great Dunmow to London. The seal box is a tantalising hint of the daily traffic carried through our district.

Learning in Lockdown 3.0 - Charlotte Pratt

At this time last year I couldn't have dreamt that I would be writing another article about lockdown learning! However here we still are in lockdown 3.0; at least now the end does feel like it's in sight! Despite the difficulties in delivering outreach and learning services during a national lockdown we have still managed to keep engaging with our audiences; both virtually and through the continuing offer of the Click and Collect activity packs. To date we have produced over 350 of these packs and its great to feel that our visitors are still benefiting from the amazing collection we hold here at the Museum, even though they can't visit in person.



Our recent activity packs have included "Fantastic Beasts" inspired by our current exhibition "Man and Beast, a cultural history of animals" which I curated last year in preparation for our reopening in 2020! The exhibition remains in place in preparation for our reopening this year and I hope you all get the opportunity to come and take a look. And yes, the rather dashing gentleman in the poster is our very own Len Pole, thanks for letting me use your image Len!

As well as the physical activity packs, I have also been working hard on our digital offer. Feedback from the public and schools, collected by Julia Holberry Associates as part of our lottery project, showed that there was a need for us to provide blended learning opportunities to our audiences. This means providing good quality digital resources which work alongside our physical offer of sessions, loan boxes and activities. In response to this need I have developed a new learning site; accessed via our website using the online learning resources button in the main menu.

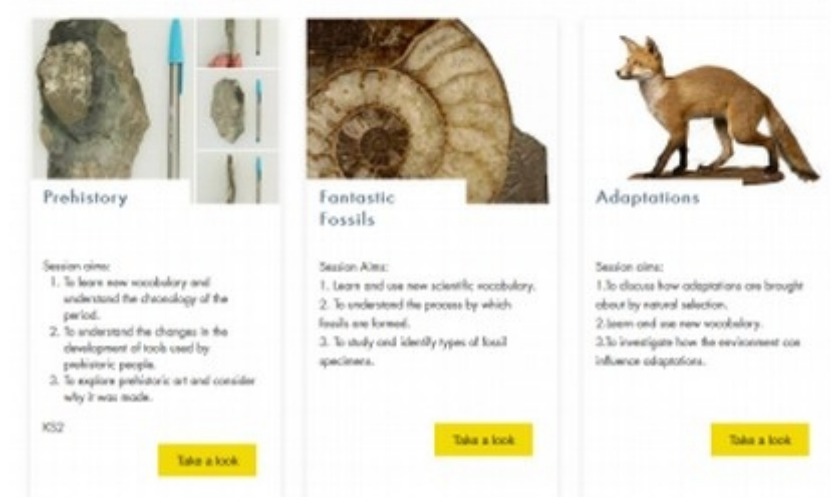
I built the website using a website building platform “Wix” which enables greater flexibility in layout than our current website platform. The greater flexibility has enabled me to include lots of interactive features as well as presenting the information in a way that works well for children and adults alike.



On entering the new learning site visitors are welcomed to the online learning hub with a range of options. They can explore the free online learning resources for all (more on that later) or follow the links to explore in greater detail the broad range of services that we offer.

It is hoped that this initial page shows that we do not simply cater to the needs of primary schools, but to our whole community. Each link takes the visitor to page which details the services we offer for that particular group, including for the first time the entire list of taught sessions and loan boxes that we offer, with descriptions and images!

The online learning resources section of the website contains free lessons, based on the Museum’s collections, which can be accessed by anyone with access to the internet. The lessons work well on their own, making them great for home schooling or activities to do on a rainy day, but they can also be used in conjunction with one of our loan boxes delivering the blended learning requested by schools.



There are currently six sessions available but I will be adding to these on a regular basis until we have covered a good range of topics for all age groups, from preschool to reminiscence for older adults. I would love to hear any requests or suggestions, so please get in touch if you have any feedback.



The digital theme has continued with both James Lumbard and myself creating videos for Industry Week at Chelmsford College. The online event was held from the 1st to the 5th of March and featured videos and Q&As from many organisations, to help to inspire and inform the students at the college and help them take their first steps to their future career. It was great to be asked to take part in the event especially as the students represent one of the age groups we find hard to reach at present.

I would like to also take this opportunity to thank my colleagues at the Museum, Museum Society and the Council Offices for their advice and support in development of the Learning Hub website. Extra special thanks to James for the enormous amount of spell checking he has done, hopefully Wix will add a spell check function soon!

Learning at Saffron Walden Museum: Charlotte Pratt

New member of the team!

The Audience Development Report from Julia Holberry Associates highlighted a number of ways in which we could develop the content of the Museum's permanent galleries; making them more accessible and appealing to our audiences. The closure of the Museum due to coronavirus presented an opportunity to start on some of the smaller ideas raised in the report, one of which was "selfie stations", places where visitors could take engaging selfies which they could share on social media. We thought this would be a good place to start as it offered an opportunity to create a hands-off interactive, that not only met a recommendation made in the report, but was also Covid secure, particularly important when we have had to remove some of our popular interactive displays, such as the sand pit and the touch artefacts in the prehistory gallery.

The removal of the touch artefacts in the prehistory gallery left a rather unattractive brown corner, and so this seemed like an ideal spot for our trial selfie station, and who better to feature in the prehistory gallery than our very own prehistoric lady. My background is in art and design, and whilst studying for my degree my practice was largely focused on sculpture, specifically mould making and life casting, so I decided to put these skills to use in her creation.

The first step was research, starting with the models by Kennis and Kennis of the early Homo Neanderthalensis, the Neanderthal, at the NHM London. (Ed; See <https://www.kenniskennis.com/site/sculptures/>) I found a number of videos of the creation of these models, which started using a cast model of a skull or skeleton. The musculature is then built up using forensic facial reconstruction technique, with features such as scars and wrinkles being added at the final stage. So, after a free online course in forensic facial reconstruction from The University of Sheffield I was ready to get started.



I began by placing pegs onto the model skull which represent the muscle depth at specific points on the skull. I added the muscle groups in order of their position on the skull, and finished with a thin layer of plasticine as the skin, and some life cast ears.



The head was then added to the repurposed body of the Anglo-Saxon weaver who used to frequent the gallery. In order to cast the head a two part mould was made by covering the original in plaster.



Once the plaster had set, the two halves of the mould were separated, and cleaned out of the original model, with the model skull retained for use in natural history learning sessions. The inside of each half of the mould was then painted with latex tinted with acrylic paint, to give the basic skin tone. Once dry both halves of the mould were joined together and filled with further layers of latex and expanding foam for structure. The form was then released from the mould successfully (thankfully!)



The head was reunited with the body and details added including individual eyebrow hairs (you can buy these on Amazon – would you believe it!). Hands and feet were cast from life, which did involve me balancing in the kitchen with one foot in a cardboard box filled with alginate (a life casting compound).

Our lady was then assembled, with a wig, glass eyes and dressed in an animal skin outfit. She is now situated in a Stone Age scene, with a cave bear emerging from sleep behind her, as shown in the photo on the right -

Don't worry; cave bears are vegetarian.

Charlotte Pratt



Volunteer News: Wendy-Jo Atter

Due to the Covid 19 situation, the majority of our volunteers remain at home. We envisage volunteers returning to the Museum when it fully re-opens to the public later in 2021.

Welcome Desk Volunteers

Whilst the Museum has been closed to the public we have been grateful for the support of our Welcome Desk volunteers who have assisted with preparation of the Museum Shop, tested the Welcome Desk Covid procedures and contributed to the production of the new till user guide.

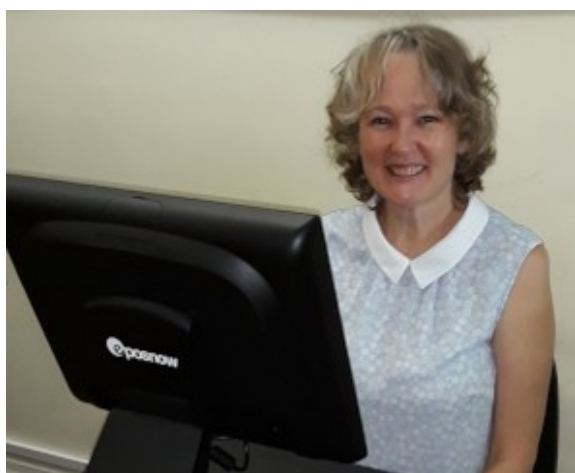
Natural Sciences Volunteers

Verge volunteers helped check 46 special roadside verges to check they had full width cuts in October and November and record problems with posts. They also assisted with a public enquiry regarding ammonite.

Volunteering Opportunities

Our Welcome Desk is run entirely by dedicated volunteers. They provide a friendly welcome for visitors, sell tickets and merchandise, provide information about the museum, and direct enquiries to members of staff. They usually volunteer for a 2.5 hour shift, every day except Monday and Saturday. We are currently looking for new Welcome Desk volunteers – if you are interested, please contact the Museum on 01799 510333 or email museum@uttlesford.gov.uk

Museum Shop: Wendy-Jo Atter



Cashless Payments

Whilst the Museum has been closed to the public we have been busy installing an electronic till and card payment facilities.

Thank you to those members of the Museum Society who tested the system by purchasing souvenirs during the exclusive preview event in December 2020.

New Product Line



We have introduced a range of greeting cards, designed by award winning illustrator Daniel Mackie, with images of animals with their natural environment depicted within them. They have already proved popular with Museum staff, volunteers and Museum Society members.

On-line collaboration

During lock down we worked with the Saffron Walden Tourist Information Centre to sell our bespoke museum jigsaws and stationery packs via their e-shop.

The links to which can be seen below:

Jigsaw: <https://www.visitsaffronwalden.gov.uk/product/saffron-walden-museum-british-butterfly-collection-jigsaw/>

Stationery Pack: <https://www.visitsaffronwalden.gov.uk/product/saffron-walden-museum-stationery-pack/>

Museum Society News

Membership

You should have already received a reminder from me about your membership subscription renewal for the year ending 31 March 2022, which will be due on 1 April 2021. The minimum subscription remains at £15 per person but any extra is very welcome and will, of course, be used wisely.

To reduce administration, payment by standing order would be most helpful. If you would like to pay this and future subscriptions by standing order or would like bank details to make a direct payment, please contact Christine Sharpe on 01799 527546 for further details. Payment by cheque, made payable to 'Saffron Walden Museum Society Ltd' can be posted directly to the Museum or popped through the letterbox for collection. Please remember to clearly mark any correspondence 'Membership'.

Membership cards were also sent out with your 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.

Should you have not heard from me or have any queries, please get in touch at either saffronwaldenms@gmail.com or 07790 620 374.

Thank you.

Catherine Peacock
Membership

Reports on Talks

John Ray – Father of Natural History
Speaker: Jennifer Rowland
Via Zoom, 18th January 2021

John Ray was a 17th century naturalist who was later dubbed the Father of Natural History. He was born in Black Notley, Essex on 29 November 1627 and died there on 17th January 1705. His father was the village blacksmith and his mother the village herbalist; when a child he often went with her on her walks when she was collecting the plants that she needed. The house – and the forge – still stand.

The intellectual background to that period was 'The Age of Enlightenment', giving rise to the foundation of The Royal Society in 1663 attracting many of the eminent physicists and chemists of the day as members and Ray was the first natural historian to be elected as a member of the Society in 1667. The Natural History Museum was not founded until much later so the Society was a very important intellectual establishment for Ray to access.

As a child he started his education in the school run by the church in his village and showed enough promise to go to Braintree Grammar School where he continued to impress. From there he was awarded a local scholarship which took him to Cambridge for further studies for two years before his exceptional talents led him being admitted, in 1646, to Trinity College at Cambridge University. He studied there and was awarded his degree in 1648 becoming a fellow and teaching there for the next 13 years. The subjects that undergraduates were taught were based on the Aristotelian syllabus of grammar, rhetoric and logic. Ray however spent much time studying natural history, conducting experiments in his college rooms.

At that time, the plant kingdom was not classified; for instance if a plant looked like a part of the human body it was thought to heal it. Catalogues of animals did not group them as we do now. The natural world was seen as a pagan world and Ray was a practising Christian who held rather Puritanical beliefs but he preached on 'the glory of God in the wonder of nature'. He was in fact expected to take Holy Orders on becoming a fellow of Trinity but put it off until 1660! He continued his studies and began to classify plants and animals into groups, beginning to establish a scientific basis for the natural world and leading up to the establishment of species as the way of classifying it. During his time as a Tutor he worked very hard and was rated by his students of natural history as a fine teacher. He did develop ill health though, and would take long walks in the Cambridge countryside where he regained his love of nature which led in 1660 to a publication, his first of many, the Catalogue of Cambridge Flora. During this time he became friends with a number of his students who then went on to become colleagues in his studies, principally Francis Willughby. Willughby came from Warwickshire and was a great friend and supportive colleague until his untimely death in 1672. It was to his house Middleton Hall that Ray went to live on leaving Cambridge.

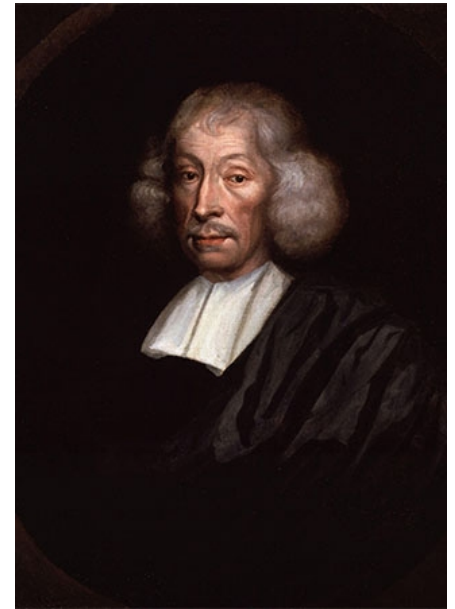


Image from the website of the John Ray Trust ©

After the Restoration of Charles II, academics were required to subscribe to the 'Act of Uniformity' which Ray felt unable to do and so left his life at Trinity. A year later, accompanied by Willughby and two other of his former pupils, Ray embarked on a three year tour of Europe to classify its natural world. He was to work on geology and plants, and Willughby the animal kingdom. Returning to England in 1666 Ray brought with him his collections of plants and started work on the publication 'Catalogue of Plants of Europe'. Willughby extended his tour to Spain and returned later to his home Middleton Hall where Ray joined him to work on his projects. In 1670 Ray published his 'Catalogue of English Plants' and it was then that, as the work was in Latin and Latin has no letter for 'W' that he dropped the initial W from the spelling of his surname. Plans went awry when Willughby died suddenly and Ray had to finish off his work on ornithology and fishes. He published the ornithology in 1676 under Willoughby's name though he had added his own contributions.

He left Essex and lived in several places in the Midlands, marrying Margaret Oakley who was much his junior in 1673, and then returning to Essex to settle in Black Notley. He continued working on his field botany and a system for the classification of plants coming up with names for parts of plants e.g. 'petal'. He carried out experiments and discovered the motion of sap in trees and worked out the system of dendrochronology and published his findings, he also wrote a dictionary for Latin, Greek and English.

Getting on a bit now, he gave up travelling and relied on fellow naturalists, e.g. Hans Sloane, to send him specimens so that he became the centre of the web of a world of collectors and his house a 'museum' and his wife and four daughters collected for him locally. His publications continued; in 1682 the 'Classification of Plants' and in 1686 the first of the 3 volumes of 'History of Plants' was issued after a delay. He published 'A History of Fishes' in the same year, for which the money for some of the illustrations had been put up by Pepys and Sir Christopher Wren among others, but the rest was so expensive that it bankrupted the Royal Society until the extra funds were forthcoming.

He also wrote in English on other subjects e.g. religion, delivering 3 volumes of 'the Wisdom of God Manifested in the Works of Creation' and folklore including 'Proverbs, Sayings and Folklore Dialect', including from Essex; 'The farther from London, the longer the miles' and 'Braintree for the pure, Bocking for the poor, Coggeshall for the jeering and Kelvedon for the whore'. Posthumously in 1710 more of his work on insects was issued which included the whole life cycle of a butterfly. This is just some of the astonishing output of a polymath. He is buried in Black Notley churchyard where his friends raised a statue in his memory. Some of his collections had to be sold to support his family.

Shortly after his death, Carl Linnaeus the Swedish naturalist and polymath was born and his work on taxonomy and other aspects of natural history came to eclipse John Ray's for a while but Gilbert White and Charles Darwin were much influenced by Ray and other naturalists since then.

The John Ray Trust was established in 1986 to advance the education of the public in the natural sciences and to raise the awareness of John Ray's work. Jennifer Rowland our speaker, is a trustee. For more information visit the website the 'John Ray Trust' <http://www.johnraytrust.com/>

The Ray Society is not about John Ray himself but exists to publish books on natural history with special, but not exclusive reference to the flora and fauna of the British Isles. To date, 178 volumes have been published. <https://www.raysociety.org.uk/>

Heather Salvidge

**The Orphans of History : Market Towns from 1700
to the Present Day. Speaker: Tony Kirby
8th February 2021 - via Zoom**

Tony led in by giving several examples of the growth in population of the great cities in the 19th century contrasted with that of market towns e.g. approximately;

Year	1801	1851	1901
Bradford	13,000	150,000	506,000
Saffron Walden	3,281	5,911	6,104

His talk was helpfully illustrated with photos of, among others, the towns of Malton, his home town in Yorkshire, Royston, Lavenham, Ely, Wisbech, Haverhill, Downham Market, Hingham, St. Ives, and Saffron Walden. His first advice to anyone wishing to gauge the age of a market town is to "look up", at the first floor of a building. Very often the ground floor will have been modernised but not that above, revealing the age of the building.

The role of the actual market place changed over time; during the Middle Ages stalls tended to become permanent buildings, sometimes with passages either side. Later it became the place around which the well-off had their houses and even when the market disappeared entirely as in Hingham, Norfolk, to become a green space, the posh people were still there around it. There tended at first for market towns to have little by the way of suburbs, especially in the 18th century if the economy of the local area 'stagnated' so that, when the houses stopped abruptly, the countryside started.

In some towns though, in 18th century central spaces were developed leading to patches of slum-like dwellings cheek-by-jowl with with elegant properties because there was still a calling to have a big "town house". The late 18th century saw the large scale development of such grand houses at 'The Brinks' in Wisbech and in the 1820's – 1830's people started to move out of town centres to more suburban locations. This tended to bring about the separation of home life from work, particularly for women who often had had a significant role in a business when the family 'lived above the shop'. Later that century detached villas became popular such as those in Saffron Walden opposite The Friends' School. In Haverhill the proprietors of the main factory built houses for their workers, which was unusual; smaller properties for shop floor workers but more comfortable dwellings for managers. Little was built for workers until the interwar period of the 20th century when council house building started in 1921 and continued until it was stopped in the 1970's. Post WWII 'Prefabs' for instance, were introduced; all the parts were made separately and assembled on site providing all mod-cons. They were very popular with their tenants.

Getting about changed too; the heyday of the stage coach was the early 19th century with East Anglian routes providing connections centred on Cambridge to, for instance, Haverhill or to Saffron Walden and on down to London. Rivers had their role to play as well; the Great Ouse flows through Ely and on along to Downham Market and beyond to King's Lynn. In 1768 the Stort in Bishop's Stortford had been canalised and two extra cuts made to provide wharves to town businesses. Wisbech prospered through being on a river and became a very busy port with a number of warehouses, one of which survives today. Then in the 1840's and 1850's the railways arrived gradually spreading throughout the country bringing further changes. Stations were usually built on the edge of towns and subsequently the towns grew out to meet them. They would have a pub or a hotel, as in Walden, catering for commercial travellers as well as locals. Stations attracted industry to local sites e.g. mills. Cattle markets had been established in town centres, as in St. Ives, but were deemed unhygienic and were moved out of the centre – but often the herdsman still had to drive cattle through the town to get to them!

In the earlier part of the 19th century more social needs were met either by public or private institutions; Subscription Rooms in Malton; several museums – Saffron Walden's was one of the earliest in conjunction with the Scientific and Literary Institute. The education of the working class children became a necessity and schools were inaugurated by The National Schools Society which was C. of E or the British Schools which were Nonconformist. The Gibson family put up the money for The Friends' School to be moved to Mount Pleasant in Saffron Walden where there was a significant Quaker population. As the time moved on dispensaries were set up and, very rarely, hospitals, Town Halls, often with a clock, were built, memorial statues to the worthy erected, local police forces were established with local courts of justice and banks (eg Gibson and Tuke, which became Barclays in Saffron Walden), and Post Offices. Churchyards and cemetery chapels were needed and acquired and, for the poor, workhouses were set up to cater for those too ill, too old or “too idle” to work. They were frightening institutions to the less well-off sections of society who dreaded having to have recourse to one.

Then came shops rather than markets though they still put goods for sale outside as well as indoors. The Co-Operative movement was a late Victorian/ early Edwardian idea, having by 1914 one third of the trade in that sector as goods were cheaper having cut out 'the middle man'. Chains of some retailers appeared. Manufacturers of shoes such as Freeman, Hardy & Willis and Simpsons had high street outlets and Dewhurst the Butchers did the same for their products. W.H. Smith started with newspaper stalls on railway stations and gradually moved into towns and expanded their range of merchandise. The bus network grew and took people from their villages right to the centre of the market towns; much more convenient than going to the nearest station, if there was one, and then walking in from the edge of town. This encouraged chains such as Woolworths and Burtons the tailors- and cinemas – to 'set up shop' in market towns. But after 1945 market towns started to struggle; first was even more competition from the really big chains and then the outskirts became 'Tescopolis', and Ocado and Amazon would deliver to your door and on-line shopping grew. A modern version of Sainsbury's late 19th century delivery bikes.

Heather Salvidge

Anglo-Saxon Rendlesham –

Speaker Faye Minter,

Senior Archaeological Officer with Suffolk County Council Archaeological Service

8th March Via Zoom

Faye introduced herself and gave a brief overview of the work of the S.C.C.A.S. which includes maintaining the Historic Environment Record for 40,000 plus sites in Suffolk. Since 2008 a series of investigations have taken place at Rendlesham at what is now known to be an important Royal Anglo-Saxon settlement, thought to be the largest and longest-lived site of its type. It is situated on the left bank of the River Deben 6kms. north of Sutton Hoo and about the same distance south of Snape. Nearby sites of interest are Ipswich, Barham and Coddanham. The first mention we have of it is from the venerable Bede in the C8th when recording a baptism, thought to have taken place in the C7th.

The County Council's work started in 2008 when some landowners were concerned that they had evidence in some fields of illegal metal detecting and of objects being taken away. The Council decided that in co-operation with other institutions it would undertake a series of surveys, the first being formal metal detecting. There would be other techniques; geophysics, air photography, fieldwalking, limited excavation and desk-based research.

A methodical survey of chosen fields was carried out by a team of four metal detectorists over a number of years and this provided many encouraging finds. The precise location of each object was recorded by G.P.S. which gave the overall period of occupation as between C5th and C8th. The focus of the finds in the north and east of the site

suggested the presence of arrivals from the near Continent. There were a high number of copper alloy cruciform brooches and insular brooches and two gold pendants dating to the late C5th/ early C6th. Some of the coins were of a type like those from Germany but some others, made by striking a dye, might have come from Kent, the main place for their manufacture.

Further south nearer what is thought to be a Hall complex they found a greater preponderance of finds dating to the C6th to C8th i.e. fewer brooches, more buckle loops, a gold and garnet sword mount, pendants and a gold stud, and a gold and garnet bead. The garnets came from either Sri Lanka or Afghanistan. They also found a gilded horse harness mount, similar to those excavated from Mound 17 at Sutton Hoo. This area revealed more Anglo-Saxon coinage than any other site, the coins were widely distributed indicating that they had been dropped and not buried as a hoard. There were also Roman coins and Byzantine currency, evidence of commerce from overseas including the eastern Mediterranean. Some high status objects were, by contrast, made here as remains of metal working were found. Many of the objects were detected as fragments; some close to each other and other bits detected fairly quickly after the first find. Others, however, were found a distance apart and up to three years later – leading to interesting detective work on the desk tops.!

The magnetometry survey, which was used in the geophysics survey, showed up ditches, enclosures and a small medieval green. Some of this was reinforced by the results of the air photography which also revealed a possible large building, 23 metres long and 9.3 metres wide - ?? The Hall?

In the late 2013 and spring of 2014 two evaluation trenches were dug in. In the first an Anglo-Saxon cremation cemetery was revealed; some ashes were buried in pots with grave goods and bones, possibly around 1,000 burials in number. Cremation was the earliest method but inhumation became more usual from the late C6th to C7th. There were some mixed cemeteries as well. In the second the dig showed up a boundary ditch, animal bones and an area of dark soil, C7th and C8th; then there were remains of sunken features, Anglo-Saxon huts which could have been working sheds or storage. Arrangements of post holes indicated the sites of possible dwellings. The trench that was dug over the big ditch had lots of animal bones in it, all useful in some way e.g. pigs and horses. There were rubbish pits too, and remains of hunting dogs. It has been estimated that the dwellings would have been inhabited by around 400 residents and perhaps traders from the Continent over here for the trade fairs. In the later part of the C8th overall activity on the site declined.

The current thinking is that this was a royal site where East Anglian kings would have stayed, feasted their followers, administered justice and collected taxes (dues) and tributes. Rendlesham is thought to be the largest royal site in the U.K. in the C6th and C7th. They now have plans for more community involvement in field walking, a workshop for cleaning and sorting finds, an environmental survey of the area around the Deben, Sutton Hoo and Rendlesham, plus some archaeological field work. There are plans to excavate The Hall in 2022 !

This is a brief overview of Faye's highly fascinating and detailed talk and I guess that I have made inaccuracies so my apologies. To know more about the what and when, I suggest you go on-line to the website Suffolk County Council Rendlesham Revealed. <https://heritage.suffolk.gov.uk/rendleshamrevealed>

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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