

Newsletter of Saffron Walden Museum Society Ltd

Autumn 2021 Issue 55

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Current Exhibition



Fossilisation:
a slice of the Anthropocene
18 Sep 2021 – 20 Mar 2022

Highlights and Happenings; From the Chairman

How well do you remember? Let's say what were you doing and where were you on 1st April 1971? No nor can I remember, but our retiring chairman Tony Watson surely can. It was the first day he joined the Museum management committee. Yes, over 50 years ago. There will be an opportunity in the Spring for us to ask Tony to tell us about that day. Today, however I will publicly thank him on your behalf for those 50 years of service advising, supporting, guiding and leading to where we are today.

We have today a full professional Museum service provided by Uttlesford District Council the contract agreed in 1974 and signed off in 1975, organised by Tony, is still the basis, broadly unchanged in our relationship with local government. He assisted in the recruitment of both Len Pole and Carolyn Wingfield both star curators. He devised the 2008 arrangements which created the purposeful company structure we have today and with Carolyn pursued over several years the ambition for professional museum storage that became in 2014 what is now the Shire Hill Heritage site. I first became a director in 2007 and I do recall my tour of the Newport Road old refuse depot which was our store then. Oh dear!



*From Left; Keith Eden, Tony Watson,
Paul Salvidge and Christine Sharpe*

Covid 19 has made all our plans difficult so an event could not be organised inside the Museum before Christmas. In March you will receive an invite to the Museum with of course, drinks and such where in addition to an exclusive showing of a new exhibition we will formally thank our long time Chairman for his outstanding contribution to our museum.

Your new Chairman is thankfully, I hope you would say, a museum enthusiast first being excited, as a small Canadian boy by a visit to the Winnipeg City Museum then as now focused on the natural environment and its people with of course those magnificent bison displays. In London growing up in the 50's I was not more than 2 bus rides away from several of the world leading museums along with smaller ones such as Horniman's at Lordship Lane.

Now retired after a 52-year business career I can just remember I was in 1971 a sales manager for a US consumer goods company. My first Chairman role was in 1988 of a now defunct brewing group that included local Manns and Norwich. Subsequent chairman roles included industries from publishing, vitamin supplementation, fin-tec, (credit management software), launching a price comparison website in 2000 and still around today, called uSwitch.com and most recently an algorithm day trading business still under testing when I retired. Along the way I was deputy chairman in the nineties of the Waltham Abbey Gunpowder Mill. What of the future? As museum lovers we are part of the Culture world that is forever growing and changing with the general public more demanding of what they want for their time and money. I have been and will remain for the time being at least chair of the Museum Development Committee and know we are well equipped and financially resourced to work with the Curator and her excellent team to devise, develop and gain support for an exciting future. More to say in the new year.

Please may I close by thanking you for your support and our volunteers and the Museum staff that ensure we have one of the finest museums of its type in the UK.

A happy New Year to you all.

Keith Eden

Curators Column;

Our Museum development project, now officially titled 'Transforming Saffron Walden Museum for the 21st Century' is off the ground! In September we submitted an 'Expression of Interest' to the National Lottery heritage Fund a necessary 'prequel' to approaching them for large Heritage Grants. We now have permission to submit a Stage 1 Development Grant Application next year. This will be for money to engage the architects and design team, and all the specialists we need, to develop detailed plans and costings, before we can apply for a second, larger grant to actually undertake the works. We meet with NLHF officers in December to discuss the project in more detail and receive advice from them.

October half-term week saw the Museum open its doors for a full Tuesday – Sunday week, for the first time since March 2019. We welcomed 357 visitors, while 143 more enjoyed 'Click and Collect' Hair-Raising Half-Term activity packs. My personal highlight of the week was definitely Thursday evening, haunting the darkened Great Hall dressed in one of Charlotte's brilliant masks as a double-headed unicorn and experiencing a different way of interacting with visitors! Some of our visitors were also dressed for the occasion: I met some very articulate and well-articulated skeletons who were definitely not from the Museum's collections!

Unlocking past lives through analysis of ancient DNA

Human skeletal remains have a special status in the Museum's collections. Strictly speaking, human remains cannot be 'owned' in law, but human remains from archaeological excavations are deposited in museums where reburial is not a practical or possible option, and where there is potential for learning more from them about past inhabitants and their lives. Human remains are excavated by archaeologists under licence from the Ministry of Justice and there are a number of codes of ethics and guidelines governing practice for the care and analysis of ancient human remains. In our Shirehill store, we follow good practice by keeping our archive of human remains (skeletal and cremated) in a row of dedicated, fixed lockable cabinets, separate from other archaeological finds which are stored on mobile open shelving. Access to the remains is controlled and vetted by museum staff. Where 'destructive' analysis is required, such as taking a minute sample of bone to run techniques such as carbon-dating or DNA analysis, our Collections Care Policy requires us to obtain permission from the Museum Society Board. This scrutiny ensures that our reasons for embarking on a particular course of research are sound and that the wider benefits justify the intervention.

Recently I was pleased to recommend to the Board a proposal from the Francis Crick Institute to take part in a new project, funded by the Wellcome Foundation, to establish the whole-genome history and evolution in a thousand ancient people from Great Britain. The UK is a world leader in studies of human genetics and its contribution to medical science, but this project will allow scientists to gain a greater understanding of ancestry change, migration and natural selection through time, and particularly how these things relate to medically-relevant genetic variants we see in groups of people today. Scientists from the Francis Crick Institute are working with museums and archaeologists to sample the ancient DNA (aDNA) of 1,000 skeletons. For museums, the benefits of collaborating with an established research institution are that we get free state-of-the-art analysis and are allowed to use the results to further our understanding and interpretation of past people's lives.



The image shows Jesse McCabe, Laboratory Research Scientist (Francis Crick Institute) carefully examining a skull in the research room at our Shirehill store. For a DNA sampling there are 3 parts of the skull that can be used: the tiny bones from inside the ear, commonly known as the hammer, anvil and stirrup; a piece of the temporal bone from the cranium; or a well-preserved tooth. I drew up a shortlist of potential candidates for analysis, based firstly on the degree of skull preservation and secondly on their potential for answering questions about the people buried and the sites from which they were excavated. They ranged in date through the late Iron Age, Roman and the Anglo-Saxon periods, covering around a thousand years between them. 30 individuals were sampled on our first day and a second day at the store with the Crick scientists is planned; after that it will be a matter of waiting for the laboratory analysis and results. Until that stage, we cannot be sure how well-preserved their DNA actually is, but I am hopeful that we will gain some new insights into the people represented in our collections, their ancestry and family relationships and possibly the diseases which they endured or succumbed to. This

will lead to new ways of using and presenting information in our displays too.

Tobacco Pipe with a Tale to Tell

The Museum is indebted to John Ready and the Fry Art Gallery, which is currently undergoing its own programme of building works. When archaeological contractors Archaeological Solutions Ltd, who were monitoring the work, recovered a particularly fine example of a decorated clay tobacco pipe, John arranged for it to be donated to Saffron Walden Museum along with some interesting research.



The bowl of the pipe has some very fine moulded decoration, showing the Prince of Wales' badge of three ostrich plumes on one side and a rifleman firing a gun from under a tree on the other. The pipe was made around 1820-40 and was probably commemorating the Napoleonic Wars. Tobacco pipes like this would have been sold all over the country, commonly available from pubs and inns. It is likely that a pipe of this design would have been particularly popular at pubs named 'The Prince of Wales' and indeed there was a 'Prince of Wales' pub at 6 London Road in Saffron Walden in the 19th century. We can imagine someone buying this pipe with a plug of tobacco over the bar at 'The Prince of Wales', taking it home and then throwing it away when the pipe stem broke.

Natural Sciences: Sarah Kenyon

It was lovely to see people again at the Museum Volunteers party. The Museum and the Special Roadside Verges project could not operate without volunteers, so a big 'Thank You' from me.

A lot of time this summer has been spent surveying verges or processing the ecological survey forms completed by the verge volunteers. Together we managed to survey 24 out of the 46 verge sites in Uttlesford which is a great achievement. Unfortunately, the number of verges in favourable botanical condition has declined since 2019. Other verges are recovering, but most of the sites are in a stable (but unfavourable) condition because the cuttings cannot be removed with the current level of funding. This habitat is very fragile and there was an increase in the number of verges that had been damaged over the last year. This could be for a variety of reasons. One verge was almost completely mown during the growing season and parts of several verges were cut by adjacent residents or landowners. Extra crash barriers were installed on two verges by the M11 motorway. An increase in traffic in the district also caused erosion of verge edges. The installation of fibre broadband has affected some sites, however, at Onslow Green in Barnston the contractors will be lifting and replacing the turf and carrying out ecological work to improve the whole verge site. Now we have an up to date assessment of the situation and can lobby for replacement of missing posts and plaques.

I enjoyed highlighting an Edible Crab as my Object of the Month for September [*see Page 7, Ed*]. It brought back fond memories of watching people fish for crabs on Cromer Pier when I was a child on family holidays and eating Cromer Crab at the beach as an adult. Other collection work has included the quarterly monitoring of traps that catch insect pests in the Museum and freezing taxidermy specimens that were on display in the Man and Beast exhibition. This ensured that the birds, lamb and insects were free from carpet beetles or moths before they went back into storage. There were some unexpected visitors in the Natural History gallery this autumn. I noticed some grit and plaster debris beneath an air vent by the display case of the Nature of North West Essex. Upon closer inspection I heard buzzing from the air vent and we found that some wasps had set up home in the wall. Unfortunately, these were some visitors that we did not want at the Museum and a pest controller had to be called.

Human History Collections: Jenny Oxley

We've had another few busy months with research enquiries and items offered for identification or donation on a broad range of themes, now that the museum is back up and running.

Over the Summer we attended an open day at the Gardens of Easton Lodge at Great Easton attended by over 250 people, where we showcased and publicised the research and learning services the Museum provides.

The Gibson library attended a Historical Pageant's Day hosted by the English Folk, Dance and Song Society (EFDSS) and King's College, London, which was held at Cecil Sharpe House on Regents Park Road in London. Over 100 people viewed archival material from our collections themed around the 1910 Walden Pageant, which was kindly showcased for us by the Gibson Library team, along with their own resources.



Collage by Temperance Kehoe part of the CV Walden archive

We are currently working with Ashdon Museum helping to advise them on how best to go about cataloguing and storing their collections to museum accreditation standards. We value networking and working in partnership with other organisations on a range of different activities and projects. So let us know if your community group, organisation or business would be interested in working with us too.

We had a visit to Stow Maries Great War Aerodrome. It was great to hear about how their museum site operates. It's always useful to learn from other people and organisations.

Our map collection stored at the Museum is currently being catalogued and gradually moved over to our external store at Shire Hill. Once this work is complete it will be a much more effective resource for researchers. The casual staff team have also recently begun to catalogue our collection of historic tokens from paper records.

Our contemporary collecting project about the Covid epidemic called CV Walden, for which we have been collecting material since March 2020 has now started to go online on the museum's website. Members of the public have donated diaries, poems, artwork and more, mostly in digital form.

In partnership with Epping Forest Museum a grant application has been submitted for an Anglo-Ethiopian co-curated collections project linked to our world cultures collections. We'll let you know more when we have a response back from the funders.

On Tuesday 21st September author Rachel Morris delivered a bookable talk to members of the public on "How to make a museum out of your own life." She was brought up not far from Saffron Walden. Her book, "The Museum Makers," began when she opened up the boxes of old family mementos under her bed and saw inside them the entire history of her bohemian family.

Despite all the years she had been running a museum-making company (called Metaphor) this was the first time that she realised that, just as museums are about making meaningful sense out of the confusion of the world, so – in what we do with our pasts and how we try to make sense of them – we are all museum-makers. Her book is part history of museums, part memoir of a wayward and bohemian family, part manual of how to make a museum out of your own life. Threaded through it are the themes that fascinate her most, of time and memory and museums and the stories families tell themselves and others. And it includes a section on Saffron Walden Museum, which was the first museum she ever visited.



Queen Mother visit

We were delighted to welcome Queen Mother Yaa Asantewaa Ababio II to Saffron Walden Museum over the Summer too. Here she is pictured with Len Pole, a former curator here at Saffron Walden Museum, who worked in Ghana in the early 1970s when he was employed in research for the National Museum of Ghana in Accra.

She specifically came to view the Ghanaian Royal and Cultural Heritage objects in the museum's World Cultures gallery. A Balafon (xylophone) of the type used at ceremonial events, from the Lo-Dagaa area of north-west Ghana, given to the Prince of Wales by the Ghana Northern Region House of Chiefs in 1961. Interestingly, there are male and female versions of these instruments; our example, with a basketry structure at the larger end, to protect the largest of the gourd resonators which protrude somewhat out of the wooden xylophone frame, is regarded as a male form.

She also viewed a miniature gold model of a Ghanaian Queen Mother's wooden stool, presented by the Eastern Region House of Chiefs Ghana to HRH Queen Elizabeth II in 1961.



These items are on loan to Saffron Walden Museum from the Royal Collection Trust. There was also a Straw apron, originating from the Bolgatanga area of North Ghana, made in the early 1970s.

Ceremonial prayers were said in front of the objects in accordance with the Traditional Royal duties that the Queen Mother carries out in the UK on behalf of Her Predecessor Queen Yaa Asantewaa I, to take care and visit the Cultural and Royal Heritage objects that are part of the Shared Royal and Commonwealth History between Britain and West Africa (Ghana).

Snapping the Stiletto Project: Campaigning for Equality

Heidi Sharp joined us during the school summer holidays as our artist in residence. She explored women's histories and untold stories, inspired by the Museum's collections. She demonstrated her art practice in our Ceramics and Glass gallery during that time and ran a couple of printing/collage workshops in the Museum. Her work and a selection of work by the workshop participants (as pictured) will go on display in the Museum shortly.



For more information about Heidi's work with us as Artist in Residence, please check out the Museum's learning site <https://www.swmuseumlearning.com/snappingthestiletto>

There is also a blog post on our website written by Heidi about her experience working at the museum. Direct Link - <https://saffronwaldenmuseum.swmuseumsoc.org.uk/latest-news-blog-article-by-our-artist-in-residence-heidi-sharp-snapping-the-stiletto-project/>

Object of the Month

September 2021

Edible Crab

Chosen by Sarah Kenyon

We are celebrating British staycations with September's 'Object of the Month'. The shell of this Edible Crab, *Cancer pagurus*, was found on the coast of Britain before 1970. It was chosen by Sarah Kenyon, one of the Natural Sciences Officers at the Museum to celebrate British staycations..

This is the largest species of crab living in the seas around Britain. The shell, or carapace, can reach a size of 25cm across. Edible Crabs may live for twenty years. This large orangey-brown crab can be recognised by the pie crust edge of its thick, oval shell and the black tips on the end of its claws. It is also the most popular crab eaten in Britain and exported to Europe.



Edible Crab SAFWM : 166633 © Saffron Walden Museum

Edible or Brown Crabs live on the lower shore and in the sea, down to a depth of 100 metres. They can be found hiding under rocks on rocky shores, or amongst weeds off the shoreline. The predator comes out to hunt for mussels, whelks or smaller crabs and will dig in the sand for razor clams and other shellfish.

Growing Up

To grow in size a crab sheds the shell that has become too small in a process called moulting. The crab is larger in size and the soft exoskeleton hardens to form the new shell that is its suit of armour. You might find an old, empty shell on the beach or in a rock pool. Female crabs move inshore to moult and mate with male crabs in late spring. They move offshore again later in the summer and fertilise their eggs in late winter. The eggs are carried around for about six weeks before they hatch as planktonic larvae. Young crabs can often be found sheltering amongst the rocks on rocky shores. Large, older males move great distances from the shoreline down to depths of 100 metres offshore.

Crabs

What are crabs?

- They are Arthropods - an invertebrate animal with an external skeleton (exoskeleton) for support and jointed appendages. The largest group in the animal kingdom includes Insects, Arachnids, Myriapods (like Centipedes) and Crustaceans.
- They are Crustaceans - animals with two pairs of antennae and a hard exoskeleton for protection.
- They are Decapods - meaning they have ten legs. This group includes Crabs, Lobsters, Shrimps and Prawns.
- Crabs have four pairs of legs for swimming or walking. The other pair has evolved into a set of claws with pincers which they use to catch, crush and tear up prey. The claws are also used to fight and to communicate.
- There are over 60 species of crab found in British waters. This includes Edible, Hermit, Masked, Nut, Porcelain, Shore, Spider and Swimming crabs!

If you explore rock pools please replace any rocks that you turn over and put back any creatures in the place where you found them. Leave the rock pool as you found it to help the animals and plants that live there.

October 2021
Fossilised Plants
Chosen by James Lumbard

October's Objects of the Month chosen by James Lumbard, one of our Natural Science's Officers are examples of fossilised plants.

Fossils can form in different ways depending on where they form, and the type of plant or animal.

Most fossils come from the hard parts of animals such as bones, teeth or shells. For plants, wood is the most common material to fossilise because it is quite hard, and takes longer to rot away than other parts. Soft leaves and flowers need to be buried quickly in deep sediment like mud or volcanic ash where the low oxygen levels mean they won't rot. Once underground, plant material can fossilise in different ways.

Compression

This flower is probably preserved by compression, like pressing and drying it in fine mud over millions of years. Heat and pressure deep underground turned the mud to stone and forced moisture and gases from the leaf at the same time.

The main ingredient in living plants is carbon, so a thin, black, carbon-rich film is all that's left. In most fossils, new minerals replace the original material. But because this is a compression fossil, the carbon-rich film is the exact same carbon that was in the plant millions of years ago. Soft-bodied animals like squid can also be preserved like this.



Dark stone with faint tracing of a fossil flower in two petal shapes © SWM

Impression



Dark stone showing impression of a fern leaf, with fronds alternating in an exaggerated sawtooth pattern © SWM

This fern leaf, or frond, is preserved as an impression. When something soft is preserved by compression, the shape of it is also preserved as an impression, like pressing a leaf into soft mud or clay and then removing it.

This fossil is one part of a small rock nodule which was split in two to show the leaf – this part shows the impression of the frond. Because compression and impression fossils usually form together, the word 'adpression' describes both at the same time.

Petrification

Fossilised wood is often called 'petrified' wood, meaning wood 'turned to stone'. It happens when the materials (cellulose and lignin) that make up the solid part of wood are replaced by minerals, turning it to stone.

Minerals dissolved in groundwater seeping through the sediment settle as solids in the microscopic cell walls of the wood as the cellulose and lignin slowly rot. This can create a perfect stone copy of the original structure of the wood.



Wedge of dark fossil wood, narrow at left. Lines of pale grey run top-bottom showing growth rings. © SWM

November 2021
Bronze and iron Lynch Pin
Chosen by Carolyn Wingfield

November's Object of the Month is a bronze and iron lynch pin from an Iron Age chariot wheel, chosen by our Curator Carolyn Wingfield. It is at least 2,000 years old and was found in Radwinter parish by local detectorist James Patmore, who has kindly loaned it to the Museum.

This lynch pin is far more than just a functional piece of metalwork from a horse-drawn cart; it is a beautifully cast and decorated piece of late Iron Age bronze work and was made for the chariot of an ancient British warrior.



The lynch pin keeps the hub of a wheel in place. In Britain, there is evidence for the use of horses and wheeled vehicles from the Bronze Age, but the use of horses in warfare seems to have developed among the warrior class of Iron Age society. Their mastery of lightweight, two-wheeled chariots, drawn by a pair of native ponies, was described and admired by Julius Caesar, in his campaigns in Britain of 55 and 54 BC:

"In chariot fighting the Britons begin by driving all over the field, hurling javelins, and generally the terror inspired by the horses and the noise of the wheels are sufficient to throw their opponents' ranks into disorder....even on a steep incline they are able to control the horses at full gallop, and to check and turn them in a moment".

(Julia Caesar, The Conquest of Gaul, translated by S A Handford, 1951, Penguin Classics)

Some chariot lynch pins have enamel inlay surviving, as on another example on display in the Museum, though this lynch pin, acquired in the 19th century, has one end missing and no record of where it came from. Iron Age lynch pins like these are found occasionally across Britain, and are thought to date from around 300 BC to AD 100. So the Radwinter lynch pin is a very welcome addition to the displays. Who knows, maybe its owner was fighting during Caesar's campaigns, or the Roman invasion of AD 43, or even Boudicca's revolt of AD 60-61?

Learning at Saffron Walden Museum: Charlotte Pratt



Post lockdown learning

As things gradually begin to open up again it has been a bit of a conundrum as to how to run our learning services. Many people are still nervous about being indoors whilst others are desperate to get back to normal.

Over the summer the Learning Team (myself and the fantastic learning volunteers) ran our first in person events since the start of the pandemic "Crafts at the Castle". We decided to combine the activity packs with an option for visitors to sit with us outside and complete one of the activities in the packs with a little help from us.



There were five different packs in total, Castles (to celebrate the newly opened castle) under the sea, brilliant beasts, toys and games and wonderful wildlife. Over the course of the five weeks, we sold 137 packs and engaged with approximately 342 visitors. Each week we had to set up our outside space, taking the gazebos, chairs, tables, materials, and packs from their storage in various places of the museum to outside on the grass then return it all at the end of the day, which was a large undertaking!

Thankfully we were very lucky with the weather

and had lots of great interactions with the public, which made all the fetching and carrying worthwhile! I would like to take this opportunity to thank all the volunteers who helped over the summer, whether you were packing up endless activity packs and lugging tables around with me or getting to grips with the new till on the front desk – we wouldn't have had such a successful summer without your help and support.



Strange creatures were abroad in the Museum for October half term as we hosted our first Museums at night event since 2019. Staff and volunteers alike including one very enthusiastic Curator, roamed the galleries as double headed true or false monsters as the Museum was transformed into a spooky forest for the evening. Great fun was had by all and we had over 70 visitors in the 1.5 hours we were open – not too bad! A special thanks to everyone who worked late on the night, including our super volunteers. And a very big thank you to Jeanette Fulcher, for being

such a massive help with the costumes – as helping me realise the visions for the spooky forest – I couldn't have done it without you!

Volunteer News: Wendy-Jo Atter

Museum celebrates volunteers at tea party

A celebration tea party has been held for the wonderful volunteers of Saffron Walden Museum. The museum has over 50 volunteers who contribute thousands of hours throughout the year. They help to fulfil a number of different roles such as running the welcome desk, sorting and cataloguing human history and natural sciences collections, and helping to run the popular learning activities.



The volunteer tea party event is usually held during national Volunteers Week in June but was delayed this year due to coronavirus restrictions.

Carolyn Wingfield, the museum's curator, said: "After a difficult 18 months or so, it is fantastic that the museum has been able to reopen and welcome people back – our volunteers have played a huge part in this. Without them, the museum simply could not operate. We very much appreciate all that they do, and we are delighted to celebrate and thank them for their continued support."

The museum is always looking for new volunteers to join the team on a regular basis, or to provide ad-hoc cover. To find out more, visit the museum website at www.saffronwaldenmuseum.org, call 01799 510333 or email museum@uttlesford.gov.uk.

Shop News

Christmas Shopping opportunities at Saffron Walden Museum

Original Christmas Gifts

Our Museum Shop offers bespoke ranges, such as our 'British Butterflies Collection' Jigsaw Puzzle, stocking fillers and unique gifts including our Annual Season Tickets. All your Christmas shopping dilemmas solved in one go!

Shop with a Conscience

By shopping here, you are actively contributing to Saffron Walden Museum's future sustainability and success.

What better way to give back at Christmas?

Jigsaw Puzzle

Our 'British Butterflies Collection' Jigsaw Puzzle is an excellent Christmas gift: 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.

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.

Forthcoming Event



Museum Shop Sunday
28 November 2021
2.00 - 4.30pm



Original Gifts

Our Museum Shop offers bespoke ranges, stocking fillers and unique gifts inspired by our collections.

All your Christmas shopping dilemmas solved in one go!



Shop with a Conscience

Every purchase helps Saffron Walden Museum look after years of history.

What better way to give back at Christmas?



Meet the Author

Come and meet Rachel Morris, who will be giving a talk on "*How to make a museum out of your own life*" and signing copies of her book *The Museum Makers*. Saffron Walden Museum features prominently in the book.



Meet the Author Event

Admissions: Adults £2.50; Concessions £1.25; Under 18s Free.
Website: www.saffronwaldenmuseum.org Tel: 01799 510333

Museum Society News

The new Board

At the recent Board Meeting the following Members of the Board of the Saffron Walden Museum Society Ltd were appointed:

Chairman:	Keith Eden
Vice-Chairman:	Paul Salvidge
Company Secretary:	Christine Sharpe
Treasurer:	Christine Sharpe
Secretary to the Board:	Richard Priestley
Other members:	Barbara Light
	Tony Watson
	Douglas Kent

Introducing Douglas Kent

I was brought up in the Saffron Walden area and its heritage has influenced both my professional interest in building conservation and my broader appreciation of old buildings and the historic environment.

I attended the R A Butler and Friends' Schools. After studying away at university, I returned to work locally and qualified as a Chartered Building Surveyor. I had an initial period with a Saffron Walden-based firm of surveyors and architects, then moved to the Property Services Agency (a Government agency) in Cambridge, from where I was later seconded to surveying roles at two air force stations in East Anglia. During this time I obtained a post-graduate degree in building conservation and since 2000 have been employed in the voluntary sector as Technical and Research Director at the Society for the Protection of Ancient Buildings (SPAB), Britain's oldest charity campaigning to protect old buildings from harm.

I am privileged to own 25-27 Church Street in Saffron Walden, a 14th-century, Grade I-listed property forming part of the Old Sun Inn. I am currently undertaking extensive renovation work and enjoy opening my house for tours on set dates to offer an additional attraction for local people and visitors to the town's historic core. I treasure an old schoolbook with a drawing I made, coincidentally, of the Old Sun Inn as a teenager. By another twist of fate, I discovered that in the 1930s the Old Sun Inn was saved from 'the hands of spoilers' by my present employer, the SPAB.



I serve on the committee of the Saffron Walden Heritage Development Group as well as Stansted Airport Watch (formerly Stop Stansted Expansion) and am a founder trustee, and now chairman, of the Hundred Parishes Society. The society aims to increase awareness, enjoyment and care of the Hundred Parishes, a large, attractive, gently undulating area, around 450 square miles of north-west Essex, north-east Hertfordshire and southern Cambridgeshire. By becoming a director of the Museum Society, I look forward to extending my involvement with the local heritage, particularly as the Museum commences an exciting and ambitious development project.

Membership

The special offer for new members is active again. For anyone who joins the society now, the next subscription will not be due until 2023. As the subscription year runs from 1 April to 31 March this means up to 17 months membership for the price of 12 Tell your friends!

'Come and Join Us' leaflets are in the museum, on our website www.swmuseumsoc.org.uk or are available from me at any time.

Perhaps you can help in another way: -

The Society appreciates the financial help of those members who are UK taxpayers and make Gift Aid declarations, thus enabling us to claim tax refunds which boost our funds. If you have not already done so, please consider whether you too, could help the Society in this way.

For example, if you pay the minimum subscription of £15 and pay Income tax or Capital Gains tax in the appropriate year, we can claim a tax refund of £3.75 at no further cost to you. (Indeed, if you pay tax at more than the basic rate, you may be able to claim further relief in your own tax return. This would be entirely up to you, and we would not need to know)

Christine Sharpe

Reports on Talks and Events

Mon. 13 Sept 2021 - The Secret Life of a Wood -

a talk by Roger Hance

By Zoom hosted by Richard Priestley

If, when you go for a woodland walk, you simply enjoy the stroll along woodland ways and look up at 'the trees' and just enjoy more sunlit areas and are not too aware about the seasonal changes, then Roger's talk about the birds, mammals, insects, wild flowers, fungi and other inhabitants will give you a great deal more to interest you in future. It was a great help that he is also an award-winning photographer whose photos illustrated the subjects he talked about .

He started by showing shots of activity around a badger sett in a Devonshire wood in the early evening . You must be still and quiet to watch badgers and stay up wind but they do have poor eyesight . They don't truly hibernate and emerge during milder spells in the winter using their sharp claws to find worms, carrion, grubs, beetles and other bugs.

When the long, yellow hazel catkins come into flower you know that other things will start soon e.g shoots on brambles, ramsons – the wild garlic – with it's 6 star-like white petals and broad green, garlic smelling leaves, and then bluebells; our country is host to ¾ of the world's population of these flowers. Orange tip butterflies are seen about and dance among the other emerging flowers; white wood anemones- another 6 petalled flower, and the white greater stitchwort that has many more. The pale yellow oxlip is another woodland plant, like cowslip to look at but is more hairy and whose flowers nod in a one-sided cluster. Also herb paris which can be difficult to spot among other greenery and hedge woundwort used by apothecaries of old to stem blood. Then moschatel or 'Town Hall Clock, only 3 to 4 inches tall and the delicate mauve Lady's Smock or cuckoo flower which indeed co-incides with the April cuckoo and yet more butterflies emerge e.g. marbled whites which , like other butterflies has bulbous bits on the tip of its antennae whereas nearly all moths don't.

Now is the time for birdsong; the dunnock and male wren are heard and others join in and greater spotted woodpeckers drum to advertise their presence and look for insects in bark crevices and use their long tongues to extract them. The call of the green woodpecker, or yaffle, is more like a laugh and he can be seen by woodland pools having a drink – other birds use these too to drink and for bathing to sort out their plumage.

Greenfinches were hit by disease a while ago but now their numbers are recovering, nuthatches nest in existing holes adapting them to their use. Some well known woodland birds that also frequent our gardens are robins (our winter songster) blue tits , coal tits, long-tailed-tits, the less common marsh tit and the lovely song thrush and stock dove.

Later to flower are bee orchids, white hellebores and, deep inside the wood, bird's nest orchid and twayblades. These all attract appropriate bees or moths.

Where there is water there can be frogs, toads and newts and so various spawns. Not long after spawning the adults move on and the tadpoles etc. take over. Damsel flies and dragonflies also need water for

procreation and feeding; where there are clear streams or rivers there are useful plants such as water buttercup. Grass snakes have the informal name of water snakes for good reason as they swim in water looking for tadpoles to eat. They are though, harmless to humans and can be identified by their pale yellow neck ring. It is adders (or vipers) that are poisonous and have V marks on their backs.

Stag beetles live in woods on rotting timber and a variety of shield bugs find different hosts; wood ants make huge nest heaps from woodland materials to lay eggs and raise their young.

As well as badgers, mammals include foxes and red and fallow deer both of which mate in the Autumn. Hedgehogs have spring broods and sometimes summer broods but these latter survive only if they find enough to eat to put on weight to see them through winter but this is the time when ripe berries and seeds of all sorts are about, to the delight of some birds, for instance bullfinches whose males are brightly coloured with a deep pink throat and chest and coal black heads; females have the black head but their chests are a calmer greyish buff, the better to act as camouflage when they are sitting on the nest. The jays with their bright blue wing flash and raucous call search out acorns and stockpile them for winter.

In autumn too, many of the fungi appear and Roger had a superb set of photos illustrating the various types as indeed he had for the moths of the woodland, the purple emperor, a moth of oak trees, the silver Y with its letter-shaped mark, the swallow tail and the privet hawk moth were just a few.

Had I recorded here the details of each of Roger's stunning photographs I would still be writing but I hope there is enough in the content I have written to give the gist to make your woodland walks even more enjoyable than they are now. As the man said 'You could always look them up on your phone'

Thank you Roger for taking us through the happenings of a year in a woodland.

Heather Salvidge

October 11th 2021.

The Stort Story – Speaker, Richard Thomas

Zoom Host – Richard Priestley

This talk is about the story of the Stort Navigation which is 13 $\frac{3}{4}$ miles long, drops 92 feet and has 15 locks, but Richard started by tracing the Stort river's source and early use. It rises in woodland called The Ash Grove near the junction of the three counties, Herts, Essex and Cambridgeshire, looking initially like a ditch but by the time it gets to Clavering it is quite significant and has fords. Flowing along the valley past Manuden it is joined by Stansted Brook just south of Stansted. There were two old mills recorded for this stretch of the river, Bentfield and a mile further along, Parsonage. At the Causeway bridge in Bishop's Stortford, the 13 mile long Stort river becomes the Stort Navigation. This flows from Stortford to Sawbridgeworth via Spellbrook and Sheering, through Harlow where for two miles or so it serves as the border between Hertfordshire and Essex, on till Parndon then to Roydon and beyond where it finally joins the Lea. It was not always called the Stort, the 1576 Saxton's map marks it as 'Stour' and the town's much earlier name was 'Estarteford' and acquired the adjunct when the then Bishop of London bought it from Edith the Fair for £8:00. in the 11th century but by the 18th century it was Bishop's Stortford.

In 1758 Thomas Adderley, maltster and landlord of a pub at Hockerill, convened a meeting to discuss applying to Parliament for a Bill to make the Stort navigable south of Stortford. There were many maltings in the town but the means of transport of the malt and other goods was by horse and cart along dodgy roads. Water transport could carry greater tonnage and be quicker. Alas the application failed. Then a man called George Jackson got interested; he was an M.P. and a senior figure in the Admiralty who had backing and access to finance it. Some preliminary work was done and in 1765 a surveyor, John Smeaton made a list of all the mills and millers. On 30th April 1766 the Act to make the Stort into a Navigation was passed and work started; it took three years and was said to have cost £100,000 though our speaker and others suggest the figure of £20,000 was nearer the mark. Opening Day was scheduled for 24th October 1769 and a grand feast was arranged.

As one of the principals involved, George Jackson wrote about it in his diary. In the evening two barges and a skiff arrived, this last bringing the contractor and Mr. Yeoman the engineer who declared that Bishop's Stortford 'was now open to all the ports of the world' which, come to think of it, it was! George Jackson tells

us that there was laid on for the guests '3 oxen, dressed and 7 hams, vegetables and bread and wine'. As they sat down to eat the 'crowd' broke in and took the meat. Jackson records 'I saved the wine' There had been bread and ale for 'the people' but as time wore on, 'the people' became more rowdy and the organisers emptied the remaining hogshead to prevent further wild behaviour. The next day George Jackson left Bishop's Stortford with a sore head.

The Navigation opened with three wharves; the terminus wharf, the Hockerill cut which supported a timber yard and the then mill and mill stream. The old line flowed much closer to what is currently Coopers Store and the mill stood where we now enter Jackson Square, up the stairs. After 18 years, in 1787, Jackson bought out the other investors and became sole proprietor having as yet not earned 'a penny interest' despite the traffic using the Stort. In 1791 he was dubbed Sir George Jackson and marked it by issuing a halfpenny token reflecting his involvement with Bishop's Stortford and the Navigation. In 1797 he inherited the estate of Sir Thomas Duckett, his second wife's uncle, on condition that he took his name and coat of arms. Reader, he did and became Sir George Duckett. He used the money to pay off the outstanding mortgages on the Navigation.

The Navigation leaves Stortford by Southmill lock and Twyford lock and mill. Of the 15 locks on the navigation, all but two are turf lined with brick abutments to support the gates rather than brick lined. This reduced the construction costs considerably. Richard then took us further south, through locks, under bridges and past the arm leading down to Hallingbury Mill and its marina.

Now, between 1779 and 1812 there was something else going on. There was a prolonged attempt to link the Navigation with the river Cam or Granta and then up to the Great Ouse. The scheme failed because the then incumbent of Audley End House, Lord Howard de Walden, said that the canal would not be allowed to go through his grounds and so would have to go round. The proposed diversionary route was 20 miles long and thus the scheme died.

When Sir George Duckett died in 1822 his son, also George, inherited his estate and shortly afterwards mortgaged the Navigation for £40,000 to banker Richard Hanbury Gurney to use the money to build a link from the Lee navigation to the Regents Canal in London. It was not a financial success and he went bankrupt in 1832. Both canals were put up for auction the following year but found no buyers. It remained in the hands of the Official Receiver for 21 years until Gurney foreclosed on it in 1853, dying shortly afterwards when it devolved to Gurney and Co. Eventually it was bought in 1873 by Truman Hanbury and Buxton but only for £15,000 for by now competition from the freight carried by rail was making an impact and tolls on the Navigation were feeling it.

Richard took our journey onwards, through Spellbrook, Tednambury, Sawbridgeworth, Sheering and the Lawrence Moorings where the furniture factory once stood, switching in the war to making the fuselages for Mosquito aircraft and then on past Pishobury Hall. Shortly before the Stort turns to flow westwards, the Pincey Brook flows in to help take it through Harlow. Since 2008 the locks in Harlow all have river inspired sculptures and a suitable saying or poem e.g. 'Men may come and go but the river goes on for ever.' Another lock has three carved stone globes and simply the words 'Short, Stort, Thought'. Leaving Parndon Mill, now artists studios, for a while the waterway serves as the county boundary between Herts and Essex. Near Roydon the river and the navigation divide for a fairly long stretch then rejoin and finally flow into the Lea at Fields Weir.

In 1857 Gurney and Co. had appointed a manager for the Navigation, he was J.P. Davis who was also with the Eastern Counties Railway and he looked after it well after years of neglect. In 1889 Gurney's sold it to him for £100! He in turn sold it in 1898 to Sir Walter Gilbey for £500 so at last someone made a profit. Sir Walter had hoped it would revive Stortford's business somewhat. It didn't, as income from tolls dwindled and he looked to sell it on. Negotiations with the Lee Conservancy dragged on as they were not happy about the asking price, then in 1909 the brick cistern lock at Roydon collapsed and it was said that it would take 2 years to repair. The navigation was sold to the Conservancy for five shillings in 1911. The Conservancy spent a lot of money on it over the next few years and in 1924 there was a ceremony where Sir Harry Gosling M.P. declared that once again the Stort Navigation was open for business. The Conservancy continued in ownership until 1948 when British Waterways took over till 2012. Now it is cared for by The Canal and River Trust.

Richard's talk was wonderfully illustrated by a collection of 'heritage postcards', by photos given to him and by his own, more up-to-date examples. These showed well known characters of the Stort, the lock keepers cottages, maltings, the Lawrence factory and mills; the finances, who lost what and who, if anyone, made a profit; the history of different locks and mills and associated buildings; what they did then and what they do now and of the waterway how often it was wont to flood and where. We also learned the whereabouts of Point Jackson, now Cape Jackson, and Port Jackson and how come they were so named – because Sir George Jackson and Captain Cook knew each other from Admiralty days – and of course where in Bishop's Stortford you will find the Port Jackson pub and Duckett's Wharf. A fascinating talk with lots of wonderful detail, some of which I am bound to have muddled up (sorry) but enlightening and fun. Want to know even more? look for 'leeandstort.co.uk.' and click on the Stort History link

Thank you, Richard.

Heather Salvidge

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