

Museum Matters

Newsletter of Saffron Walden Museum Society Ltd

Summer 2022 Issue 57

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Highlights and Happenings; From the Chairman

You will I'm sure have in your cupboard or perhaps the garage some mugs or tea towels or perhaps a plaque on the wall with slogans like "Keep calm and carry-on", "Call this a crisis!" or even "Reasons to be cheerful".

It would seem now is the time to put them back into use!

There are however reasons to be cheerful beyond the summer weather and that is our progress following the Covid saga. The Organisation Committee has our monthly talks up and running and has a Plan for how we balance "real world" talks and life on Zoom. You can expect to hear more shortly.

The most significant reason to be cheerful is the way Carolyn and the Team have restored our place in the Community's activities. We now have established opening hours, the Museum Volunteers bringing their boundless support into play and a steady stream exhibitions and activities.

You will have received your invitation to a private view of the new and significant exhibition "The Lost Language of Nature" on 15th July. I hope to see you there.

Keith Eden

New President for Saffron Walden Museum Society Ltd

Tony Watson has been made President of the Museum Society in recognition of his 50 years' service on the Society's management committee and Board. The Society's Chairman Keith Eden presented Tony with a certificate to thank him for his extraordinary service at the Society's meeting on 9 May.

Editor



Curators Column;

After a busy start to the spring with Easter holiday activities, we've been pleased to welcome a steady stream of visitors although – like most of the museum and heritage sector – we are finding that visitor numbers are still below pre-Covid levels. So please encourage friends and family members to pay us a visit! There is a lot to see, with a new exhibition, a special world cultures exhibit on loan from the Horniman Museum (just voted 'Museum of the Year') and other projects, which my colleagues describe in this Newsletter.

On Saturday 4 June of the Platinum Jubilee Bank Holiday weekend, the Museum collaborated with Saffron Walden Town Council for a live outdoor screening in the Castle grounds of the evening concert from Buckingham Palace. Around 300 people enjoyed this free event, picnicking in the grounds and 199 of them took the opportunity to look in at the Museum, where our special Platinum Jubilee exhibits were on show. We hope you caught the Platinum Jubilee exhibits too, but if you didn't, or would like a reminder, see Jenny's article below.

Development project 'Transforming Saffron Walden Museum for the 21st Century'

We had expected to submit our Stage 1 Development Grant Application to the National Lottery Heritage Fund at the end of May, but external events have caused us to postpone our application, in order to deal with new 'risks'.

First of all, the effects of recent inflation on construction costs has been considerable, and as the greater part of our project budget is capital costs, we need to re-examine the costs estimated in 2022 by our previous project consultants, so we are not exposing ourselves to financial problems further ahead.

Secondly, although we cannot appoint an architect until we have got that Stage 1 Development Grant, we decided to trigger a process called 'Pre-Application Planning Advice' at this early stage, in order to access advice from the relevant authorities on archaeological and historic building considerations. In our case, being a listed building on a scheduled monument site, we have been advised to commission planning documents called Heritage Impact Assessments to look at the potential impact of our plans on the Museum building and on the site.

All of this will help us align our plans and budgets with what planning authorities and Historic England will need to see, and troubleshoot any potential problems at an early stage, in other words it's all about financial and planning 'risk mitigation'. This extra work will inevitably set our Stage 1 Grant Application back by some months, but means we can strengthen our application and 'inflation-proof' our project budget.

Tiny Tag – our latest ‘treasure’ acquisition

The Museum’s latest acquisition under the Treasure Act is this tiny silver hooked clothes fastener, no bigger than a 5p piece, which came off someone’s clothing in the High Roothing area one thousand years ago. What is unusual about it is the spiral design engraved on one side, which is ‘Viking’ (Anglo-Scandinavian) in style and dates it to the early 11th century. At that time, parts of eastern and northern England already had a population of mixed English (Anglo-Saxon) and Danish (Viking) descent, and the Danish king Knut became King of England in 1016 after a long campaign. The spiral decoration on this little object is in Scandinavian style, so whoever wore this was at least adopting Anglo-Scandinavian tastes, if not actually of Danish descent. The Museum was pleased to acquire this object through the Treasure Act, with thanks to the metal detectorist finder for reporting this find. It will go on display later in the year and joins a small but growing number of archaeological objects from Uttlesford suggestive of Viking influence in our district.

Carolyn Wingfield



Natural Sciences: Sarah Kenyon

Members of the verges team are conducting ecological surveys at the Special Roadside Verges this summer. So far, I have been out spotting Cowslips at Little Sampford and Crosswort at Catmere End. I will be surveying Lesser Calamint plants growing beside the path to the entrance of Audley End House next. Thank you to the people who have offered to help with the project recently. If anyone else has a good knowledge of botany, I am still looking for volunteers to conduct ecological surveys of plants at one or two verge sites. Please contact me at the Museum if you are interested and would like to learn more about what is involved.

I enjoyed putting together the Object of the Month display of May flying butterflies. It was very satisfying to see some of those butterflies flying around in the Museum grounds and in my neighbourhood, including a Brimstone, Large and Small White butterflies, a Red Admiral on Valerian plants and a blue butterfly that moved so fast I could not identify the species.



Crosswort



A case of birds from South America - Six Pomarine Skuas collected at Great Yarmouth, Norfolk in 1879 and purchased at Mr Stevenson's sale in Norwich in 1887 - Five Long-tailed Skuas from Great Yarmouth, Norfolk and Great Sampford, Essex that George Stacey Gibson of Saffron Walden presented to the Museum in 1878.

In the Inorganics store I have treated the remaining cases of birds to remove mould from the wood. The mould formed in cold and damp conditions. This was due to the rise in relative humidity linked to the drop in temperature caused by the loss of heating earlier in the year. The bird cases will be off to the Museum Store where the amount of moisture in the environment is controlled by a dehumidifier. Later in the year I will be looking for help from volunteers who moved collections from the old store in Newport and the Museum. The picture shows the three cases.

Natural Sciences: James Lumbard

Lost Language of Nature exhibition

Discover a world of lost and forgotten language, reconnecting with nature through words, stories, and the Museum's historic taxidermy bird collection. The show features over 25 newly conserved taxidermy specimens, some of which have not been out of storage for over 20 years. Visitors can see the diverse habitats in which these birds live across the world and discover some of the language and folklore which they have inspired, which historically has not featured in Museum records and displays. The exhibition also gives a chance for visitors to share their own stories about wildlife in their life, old names, nursery rhymes, fairy tales and beliefs or superstitions they may have heard about birds and other animals growing up. Charlotte and James will also be working in the mini taxidermy conservation studio in the gallery space on certain Tuesdays and Fridays throughout the exhibition – keep your eyes peeled for more information online.

NEW Community Art Commission – Lost Language of Nature project

We were thrilled to receive so many applications to our art commission in partnership with Essex Cultural Diversity project, with a very high standard of applicants across the board. After interviews at the end of July, we are very happy to appoint Harlow-based artist Janetka Platun to the Lost Language of Nature project. Janetka will work with local communities to create a unique artwork shaped by people's own experiences of nature, travel and migration and inspired by the museum's international taxidermy collection. We're really looking forward to working with Janetka and building a new type of relationship with people and communities from across Uttlesford.

<https://www.janetkaplatun.com/>

Family Fun Day Wed 17th August – Lost Language of Nature project

Join us for a one-off day of activities for the whole family as Saffron Walden Museum launches a brand new art commission for Uttlesford to record, celebrate and share your lost or hidden stories about the plants and animals we see every day.

Meet our artist Janetka and make your mark on the new artwork, get up close and personal with fearsome birds of prey, let our storyteller take you to fairy tale times and fantastic wild places, explore the Museum and Castle grounds like never before with bug hunts and plant surveys for important local wildlife, step back in time with a scythe demonstration in our wildflower meadow, and get making with children's Crafts at the Castle.

Standard museum entry fees apply (£2.50 / £1.25 / under-18s FREE).

Lost Language of Nature project

The conservation strand of the project ready for the Lost Language of Nature exhibition has been completed, conserving 34 specimens, mostly for exhibition display, with others prioritised for their poor condition. Several more days of conservation work will take place during the exhibition, in the special exhibition gallery.

With thanks for funding from Saffron Walden Museum Society, a freelance researcher - international storyteller Dominic Kelly - provided the Museum with folklore, traditional stories and local names for 52 birds commonly or once commonly seen in Britain, including the 19 species studied by the RSPB's Farmland Bird Indicator. This contributed to exhibition interpretation and will be permanently associated with our 'Modes' database records of relevant birds in the collection as part of the Lost Language project to record a wider range of information about natural history items in the collection.



Wildlife in the Museum and Castle grounds

We are very excited to share the results of a first botanical survey carried out by members of Essex Field Club Botany Group, led by Ken Adams, across the whole site. Ken and his fellow volunteers recorded 133 species of plants, including several notable species. Up to 300 examples of fiddle dock were found across the unmown areas (a new initiative for 2022), a plant which has only a handful of known records in the area. Few-flowered fumitory was also identified in a museum flower bed. This plant is classed as 'vulnerable' by the conservation charity Plantlife and is a chalk-soil specialist restricted to suitable areas of eastern and southern England. Three interesting species of butterfly spotted were marbled white (only returned to Uttlesford in the last 5-10 years), meadow brown (a grassland species) and ringlet (common in damp grassland or woodland edges).

Buglife B-Lines

The wildflower margins planted in previous years have been recognised by conservation charity Buglife as a valid pollinator project for their B-Lines initiative. B-Lines are described as 'insect pathways' running across the countryside and are needed to link existing wildlife areas together. One B-line runs across Saffron Walden, and the wildflower margins across the Museum frontage are an important stepping stone within it. <https://www.buglife.org.uk/our-work/b-lines/b-lines-east-and-midlands-of-england/>

Environmental monitoring

The Museum has been able to purchase an additional 3 digital data loggers thanks to funding provided by the Museum Society. Once set up later this summer, they will remotely monitor the environmental conditions in the 3 largest collections storage areas at Shirehill. The remaining data logger will act as a trial unit at the Museum, after discussion with UDC ICT and the external service provider suggested a possible solution for using the units with the current wifi provision.

Collections Officer, Human History : Jenny Oxley

Object in Focus: Partnership project with the Horniman Museum.



Objects in Focus is a loans programme run by the Horniman Museum in London, funded by Arts Council England, which aims to improve access to their collections and strengthen their partnerships with other museums and cultural organisations, by offering a range of objects for loan free of charge.

In July the Museum is being loaned some tattoo design examples from the Horniman Museum under this Objects in Focus scheme. These tattoo models from Sarawak, Borneo date to the 19th century. We will use them, along with other items from our collections, to share with visitors more about the history of tattooing around the world.

'Tattooing is a magical, romantic, exciting and often-misunderstood art-form'
Dr Matt Lodder, University of Essex



The display will also include a tattoo implement from Fiji, made from a bone plate with a bamboo handle, which has been decorated with plaited coconut fibre. It was collected in Viti Levu, Fiji, Oceania Polynesia in 1876.



The display will be supplemented by an online talk by Dr Lodder, from the University of Essex, who curated the British Tattoo Art Revealed exhibition which was on display in 2018 at the National Maritime Museum in Cornwall, of which you can find out more here <https://nmmc.co.uk/tattoo-british-tattoo-art-revealed/>

Platinum Jubilee display

On display in the museum over the Platinum Jubilee weekend was this framed sample of the material used to make Queen Elizabeth II's coronation dress.

The coronation was held on 2 June 1953 at Westminster Abbey, watched by 3 million spectators and a further 20 million following the event at home.

The sample was a gift from Norman Hartnell, the designer of the dress, to Miss Grizelle Fowler, as she had worked for him. Miss Fowler bequeathed the sample to the museum in 2016.

The coronation dress was ordered in October 1952 and it took 8 months of research, design and workmanship to create it. Hartnell put forward 8 different designs and Elizabeth chose her favourite.

It then took at least 3 dressmakers, 6 embroiderers and the Royal School of Needlework to create the detailed embroidery on the satin. The embroidery features the national flowers and plants of Britain and the Commonwealth countries.



These include the English Tudor rose, the Scottish thistle, the Welsh leek, the Irish shamrock, the Canadian maple leaf and the New Zealand silver fern. The design was completed in seed pearls, crystals, coloured silks and metallic threads. More information about the sample can be found here: <https://saffronwaldenmuseum.swmuseumsoc.org.uk/object-of-the-month-june-2016/>

The display also featured a great collection of royal collectibles loaned to the museum by the museum's Welcome Desk Volunteer Co-ordinator (Volunteer) June Baker.

Also on display was an impressive straw plait crown. It was made in 1953 for the Queen's Coronation celebrations by Thomas Thake the donor's grandfather.

It was hung from the screen in Wimbish church during the harvest festival after the Coronation.

Thomas (Tom) Thake was a thatcher, builder and carpenter who lived and worked in the Wimbish area. The crown stayed with the Thake family, latterly it was hanging in Tom's grandson David's garage until the donor rediscovered it!



Project Update: Greater in Spirit, Larger in Outlook

Epping Forest District Museum in Waltham Abbey and Saffron Walden Museum have received an Arts Council National Lottery project grant of £100,000 to work in partnership on their world culture collections. The aim of the project is to ensure the museums and their collections reflect their diverse communities by working directly with cultural groups to research different objects and tell their stories.

The project's title, 'Greater in Spirit, Larger in Outlook' is inspired by Haile Selassie, Emperor of Ethiopia from 1930 to 1974. Museum staff will work with relevant community groups including the Ethiopian History

Society, to explore, explain and exhibit the collection leading to a new permanent display at Epping Forest District Museum, due to be completed by the end of 2022.

A spokesperson from Ethiopian History Society UK said: *"We are delighted to partner with Epping Forest District and Saffron Walden Museums for this vital project."*

Other cultures represented in the collections include West and East Africa, India, Australia, New Zealand and the Pacific Islands.

Both museums are looking to work with relevant community and cultural groups linked to these collections which will lead to a major temporary exhibition in 2023.

Hazel Edwards, Area Director (South East) for Arts Council England, said:

"We're delighted to be able to support a project that will see source communities for these exciting collections given the important opportunity to work with Epping Forest District and Saffron Walden Museums to research, reinterpret and redisplay the material for audiences to engage with, explore and enjoy".

"I look forward to the resulting exhibitions and seeing how it might inspire other museums to work with cultural organisations to deliver similar projects."

We have recently recruited two project roles to work across both museums for this project, both called Connectors, one for collections and one for audiences, to emphasise their roles in connecting the collections with community groups and audiences.

For more about the project: <https://www.eppingforestdc.gov.uk/museum-world-culture-collections-project/>

Events: Charlotte Pratt

School Summer Holidays Crafts at the Castle: Saffron Walden

Wed 3 August, 10.30-3.30pm

Crafts at the Castle: Day at the Seaside - make a peg clam, yogurt pot jellyfish, and Winstanley's lighthouse

Wed 10 August, 10.30am-3.30pm

Crafts at the Castle: Treasure! - make a treasure chest, gold torque and design a coin.

Wed 17 August - See Lost Language of Nature event – Page 4.

Wed 24 August, 10.30-3.30pm

Crafts at the Castle: Saffron Walden - try pargeting on clay, make a model of a local building and a saffron crocus.

Wed 31 August, 10.30-3.30pm

Crafts at the Castle: Harvest - make a cow mask, a harvest mouse and a corn dolly.

How to take part:

Pre order the activity pack from our art tickets page <https://saffron-walden-museum.arttickets.org.uk/> (we may have some packs available on the day for walk ups). Each pack contains the materials you need to complete the three activities, a trail to do around the museum and an instruction booklet. Come to the museum on Wednesday to collect your activity pack and, weather permitting, join us in the Museum grounds near the castle where we will help you with the crafts in your pack and supply basic materials and equipment. Why not bring along a picnic blanket and stay for the day! If it is raining, take your pack to do at home.

Please note, pack price does not include entry to the Museum. Museum admission fees apply.

Learning at Saffron Walden Museum: Charlotte Pratt



Curiosity corner display for the Queen's Jubilee

To celebrate the Queen's Platinum Jubilee, our new "Young volunteer" Nancy Mein curated her own exhibition for Curiosity Corner, using our Kings and Queens loan box. Nancy wrote all the display text herself and was supported in the installation of the display by me. The display has been well received by visitors and Nancy will be back to curate another curiosity corner display in the not-too-distant future.

I would also like to take the opportunity to say a special thank you to June Baker for loaning so many fantastic items from her personal collection, which were not only included in this display, but also in our community case.

Activities

We continued with our jubilee theme with our May half term activity pack where participants could make their own celebration flag, ceremonial sword, and Jubilee crown. As well as the usual families, some packs were taken by members of WI groups participating in "make a crown" competitions at the meetings – I would love to have been a fly on the wall at some of those! Special thanks to my super learning volunteers for helping with the writing of the pack instructions and the deliver of the sessions. And a special thanks must go to Ann Holloway who has been a great sport in helping with packing up what must now be 100's of activity packs - and keeping all my pencils sharpened to boot! We have five activity packs planned for the summer holidays, kicking off with a seaside theme on 3rd August.



Lost Language of Nature and beyond

After a very busy two weeks of installation the "Lost Language of Nature" exhibition is up! The exhibition was co-curated by James and myself and I think we are both quite proud of what we have achieved so far in the project. The installation of the exhibition was more challenging than previous installs, due to each specimen being mounted in its own individual acrylic case, with all 22 needing to be carefully and accurately drilled by James for mounting to the backboards. Each backboard was cut from MDF (A huge thank you to Peter Morrissey and the Community shed for those!) painted to seal it, and then covered with individual backgrounds designed by myself using parts of vintage botanic illustrations. A huge thank you here also to Ian Kemp who after installing his own beautiful photographs in the exhibition, spent the afternoon helping us glue the backgrounds onto the boards! Each case is also accompanied by a range of names for each bird, from local dialect folk names to the names of the birds in other languages from across their range. I hope you will agree it's great to see these newly conserved birds, some of which have not been on display for a very long time, being enjoyed by the public again, and James and I are looking forward to the next phase of the project beginning with the launch event on the 17th of August.



The Friendly Taxidermists: Ian Kemp

I'm not a believer in any kind of mystical power but sometimes fate, luck or whatever fortune does exist in the universe, conspires to produce the opportunities you need at the time you need them. This was the case recently as I sought the chance to photograph taxidermy collections for the final semester of my BA (Hons) Degree in Photography.

Historically, the degree programme advocated that the final semester was an extension of the previous semester's project but circumstances meant that that work (centred around the 'crisis in care' and the micro communities that form within the wider local society) had to be abandoned in favour of a whole new undertaking.

As I approached the end of my course, my research took me in the direction of taxidermy and the work of museums. I was inspired by the work of Klaus Pichler, Wendy McMurdo and Zoe Leonard whose works raised questions of human interactions with museums, the questionable ways in which some historical specimens might have been gathered and ideas around the human desire to order and artificially prevent natural decay. I was also fascinated by the way in which both taxidermy and photography shared similar aims in preservation and perpetuation yet, in some way, I hoped to convey more artistically in two dimensional images than the original three dimensional specimen did.

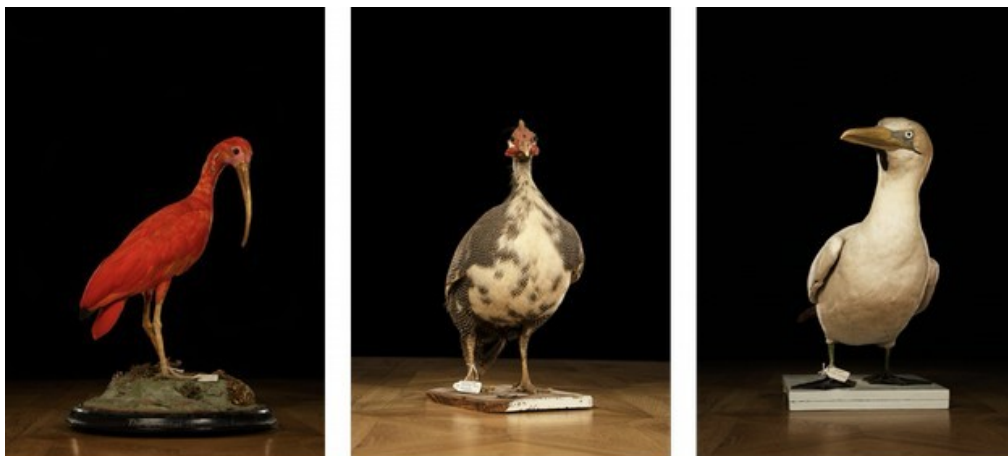


An image from Klaus Pichler's 'Skeletons in the Closet'

I tend to consider myself as a lens based artist as it more reflects my aims than the all encompassing term of 'photographer'. As such ethics plays an important part of my process and I don't ever feel I have a right to photograph anyone or anything without permission or a sound understanding that it won't adversely affect anyone. When it came to seeking out taxidermy I approached a number of museums, specialists and stately homes requesting permission to photograph their respective collections or a number of specimens. Responses ranged from nothing at all, statements suggesting that they "get bothered" by similar requests all the time and others that stated they charge for 'bench time'. Sadly some public funded organisations acknowledged my emails but never responded to my actual request; those that suggested the existence of 'bench fees' never responded to my request for a list of those fees.

All those disappointments made the positive and effusive response from Saffron Walden Museum, in the guise of Learning and Outreach Officer, Charlotte Pratt, that much more appreciated. But one offer of help alone doesn't really justify my earlier claims of celestial intervention; what did was the fact that Charlotte previously taught art on my campus, her free day each week matched the one free day I had each week, she practised taxidermy herself, she was keen to help facilitate my work, she was willing to accommodate the equipment I needed to use, she would allow me access to the museums collection and she and her colleague (James Lumbar) were involved in a project to restore some of the museums taxidermy specimens. Needless to say, I jumped at the offer of help.

In practice, this collaboration worked even better than it initially seemed it would. Charlotte, James and the staff at the museum are, without question, some of the friendliest, most congenial people I have had the pleasure of meeting. I have been treated with such kindness and respect by them and also latterly by their partners, who I had the pleasure of meeting. I felt conscious of imposing upon Charlotte and James' time but, true to their word, they facilitated my projects needs perfectly and taught me a great deal as well. To this end, my interest in the field led me to make an investment in professional lighting that uses constant LED light rather than higher powered traditional studio flash. The fact that the LEDs remain cool and the light is less harsh means they are far more suitable for museum working and photographing valuable/historic artefacts.



Three images from my project "Dominion II"

I am pleased to say the work I produced at the museum contributed to my success in my degree. The taxidermy images were very well received at the end of degree exhibition and I am exceptionally proud that the team at Saffron Walden Museum have now included them as part of their exhibition “The Lost Language of Nature; the stories science doesn’t tell” which is open now until 30th October 2022. The show Charlotte and James have created is quite stunning and I strongly recommend a visit.



Part of the “Lost Language of Nature’ exhibition currently at Saffron Walden Museum.

From my point of view this collaboration has been incredibly positive and I hope Charlotte and James feel the same. It has encouraged me to seek further collaborations in the future and I certainly have a sense that I would be glad to work in the fields of museums or collections. I am aware that there seems to be a need to photographically document and reference collections, especially those not on display. This strikes me as a most rewarding pursuit with potential to fulfil a formal documentary mandate with the possibility of including aspects of the artistic representation that might set the work apart.

Now I have completed my degree I am out in the big wide world, setting up a studio, brandishing a considerable investment in time and equipment and looking to use my talents to capture images that will elicit consideration from viewers. I will be updating my website with my taxidermy images very soon. Please take a look and feel free to get in touch if I can help in anyway.

iankemp.co.uk

Ian Kemp

Volunteer and Shop News: Wendy-Jo Atter

New in the Museum Shop

“An original Elizabeth II Florin coin supplied on a quality key chain. The key-ring is supplied with a Jubilee header card.

On sale at the Museum for £1.75”

The British florin, or two-shilling piece (2/- or 2s.) was a coin worth 1/10 of one pound, or 24 pence. It was issued from 1849 until 1967, with a final issue for collectors dated 1970. It was the last coin circulating immediately prior to decimalisation to be demonetised, in 1993, having for a quarter of a century circulated alongside the ten-pence piece, identical in specifications and value.

See More on Wikipedia - [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Florin_\(British_coin\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Florin_(British_coin))



Award by Community Update magazine

Saffron Walden Museum has been awarded a Commitment to Excellence Certificate by Community Update magazine in recognition of our work. Saffron Walden Museum preserves and shares knowledge, culture and history for past, present and future generations. Our team of staff and volunteers endeavour to provide a friendly visiting environment, great events and fascinating displays.

We are committed to excellence, continuously seeking to improve and focus upon the needs of our visitors, for example, during the recent Covid Pandemic we created a new website offering free online resources to support home learning and introduced 'Click and Collect' activity packs. We open on Tuesdays for pre-booked Groups and Schools.

Our team of Welcome Volunteers undertake thorough induction training to deliver consistent excellent service and, Visit England have recognised a Quality Assured Visitor Attraction.



Celebrations for museum volunteers at tea party

A celebration tea party has been held for the volunteers of Saffron Walden Museum. The museum has 55 volunteers around three-thousand hours throughout the year. They help to fulfil a number of different roles such as running the welcome desk, sorting and cataloguing human history collections and helping to run the popular learning activities.



The volunteer tea party was held as part of national Volunteers' Week, and was supported by Cook, Tesco and Waitrose via their community schemes.

Carolyn Wingfield, the museum's curator, said: "Our volunteers are vital to the museum – they keep it open and welcome visitors, assist with all manner of behind-the-scenes and practical tasks, and contribute much experience and knowledge of their local communities."

"After the difficulties of the Covid pandemic, when the museum had to close, we are especially grateful to all the volunteers who have returned, and to the new volunteers who have recently joined us. It's great to be able to celebrate our museum volunteers with a proper event again."

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.

Object of the Month

April 2022

Charred Key Fob

Chosen By Jenny Oxley

April's Object of the Month chosen by Jenny Oxley, Collections Officer (Human History) is a charred key fob discovered after the Rose & Crown fire in the town on Boxing Day 1969. It forms part of the museum's new exhibition, All Fired Up, by Essex Fire Museum, which charts the history of firefighting in Essex.



At 1.40 a.m. on Boxing Day 1969 a fire broke out. Sadly 11 people died in their sleep, unaware that the fire had even taken hold. 29 people were rescued, some having climbed down from the upper floor windows using knotted sheets.

The inquest ruled that the fire was caused by a faulty TV in the resident's lounge overheating. Three Saffron Walden firemen received commendations. The fire resulted in the government strengthening the fire safety regulations governing hotels and they passed a new Fire Precautions Act (1971).

The building erected in its place became 'Boots the Chemist' from 1973 onwards. A bunch of grapes carved in oak and a door canopy are all that remain of the original Rose & Crown building.

More detailed information including eyewitness accounts of the fire can be found in Zofia Everett's 2008 article published in the Saffron Walden Historical Journal and in Paul Wood's book, titled 'From Station Officer Drane'.

The fire understandably still has a major emotional impact on the town's residents over 50 years on.



Two drawers of British butterflies were our 'Objects of the Month' for May chosen by Natural Sciences Officer, Sarah Kenyon. They contain some of the butterflies that you might spot visiting your garden or local park during May. The drawers are from a wooden cabinet of butterfly specimens collected in Essex and other places in Britain between 1890 and 1968. The collection was donated to Saffron Walden Museum in 2002.



SAFWM : 2002.110.5 Butterfly cabinet drawer 5 containing Small Tortoiseshell, Peacock, Painted Lady, Red Admiral and Silver-washed Fritillary butterflies



Butterfly cabinet drawer 2 containing Small White, Green-veined White, Bath White, Orange-tip and Wood White butterflies.

Butterflies that may hibernate over winter as adults in the UK include the Brimstone, Red Admiral, Peacock, Comma and Small Tortoiseshell. This means they can wake up bright and early to make the most of sunny spring days. There are 59 species of butterfly in Britain, 57 that live in the UK and two regular migrants - the Painted Lady and Clouded Yellow.

Butterfly Conservation found that 76% of butterflies have declined in numbers and range (occurrence) over the last 40 years due to habitats being destroyed, pollution, weather patterns and climate change. Gardens and balconies are very important for butterflies because they are wildlife corridors. They cover a large area, which according to the RSPB is about 1,500 square miles or twice the size of Greater London. This habitat provides the flowering plants, such as Buddleia, that butterflies need for nectar, or nettles and thistles which are eaten by caterpillars.



Butterflies from cabinet drawers 3, 11 and 1. Brimstone male and female; Holly Blue males - upper side and underside; and female Large White butterflies - upper side and underside.

What can you do to help?

Butterfly caterpillars need nettles, thistles and shrubs like Buckthorn to eat, so leave parts of your garden to get wild and overgrown.

Plant cornfield annuals and nectar rich flowering plants such as Buddleia, Lavender, Betony and Red Valerian to provide nectar for butterflies.

Take part in No Mow May or leave part of your lawn uncut until autumn.

Enjoy watching butterflies and do the National Garden Butterfly Survey.

You can buy a jigsaw based on this collection at the Museum shop.

June 2022

Lost Language of Nature Project – Hen Harrier

Chosen by James Lumbard



This month we are celebrating the Lost Language of Nature project, with repair work to this hen harrier. Saffron Walden Museum wants to hear your stories about wildlife and nature in your life, or that you know from parents or grandparents.

Some old names for hen harriers are Blue sleeves, Vuzz kitt, Grey gled; or Ringtail for females, like this fragile mounted skin. The photo was taken during work to stabilise and preserve the bird, which came from Saffron Walden in the 1800s. Today, hen harriers are one of Britain's most threatened birds of prey. The name comes from their hunting of wildfowl, but today they are seen as a threat to managed grouse shooting in parts of England and Scotland.

With the Lost Language of Nature project, we want to hear your stories about wildlife and nature in your life, or rhymes, songs and sayings for all kinds of animals that you might have heard from parents or grandparents. For example, different old names across the country for hen harriers include Blue sleeves, Vuzz kitt, Grey gled, Furze kite and Goss harrier; or Ringtail for females, like this fragile mounted skin. Head to our website for more information <https://www.swmuseumlearning.com/the-lost-language-project>

This bird came to the Museum in the 1800s, and was taken from the area around Saffron Walden. Today, hen harriers only live in the north of England, north Wales, in Scotland and on Scottish islands, including Arran and Orkney.



Hen harriers today

Hen harriers are one of the UK's most endangered birds of prey, with only an estimated 545 breeding pairs left in the country. They are on the RSPB's Red List of endangered species in Britain, but listed as 'Least Concern' globally by the International Union for Conservation of Nature.

Work carried out by the RSPB suggests that over 2,500 pairs could survive in the UK. They live in open areas with low vegetation, like heather moors.

Between 2014 and 2019, the RSPB ran the LIFE project to learn more about hen harriers in Britain, their movements throughout the year and to understand why their numbers are so low. They tagged over 100 birds that they tracked using satellites, and found that some fly 1000 miles to spend the winter in Spain and Portugal. Not all birds do this though – the brother of one of these wandering birds always stayed within 50 miles of where he hatched.

In the UK, hen harriers are protected under Schedule 1 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act, meaning it is illegal to kill, injure or capture the birds, their eggs or nests, or even disturb the birds and their young while they are nesting. Despite this, the study showed that the numbers of breeding hen harriers fell by 24% (about one-quarter) between 2004 and 2016. In particular, the project monitored seven Special Protected Areas in parts of the country where land is managed for driven grouse shooting. In these seven areas, hen harrier numbers fell by over 80%, which suggests that there is deliberate human action to reduce their numbers in these areas.

References

<https://www.rspb.org.uk/birds-and-wildlife/wildlife-guides/bird-a-z/hen-harrier/>

<https://www.rspb.org.uk/our-work/conservation/projects/hen-harrier-life/about-the-project/>

<https://community.rspb.org.uk/ourwork/skydancer/b/skydancer>

<https://community.rspb.org.uk/ourwork/skydancer/b/skydancer/posts/hen-harrier-apollo-bomber-migrate-1000-miles-to-spain>

<https://www.rspb.org.uk/our-work/conservation/projects/hen-harrier-life/best-places-to-see-hen-harriersnew-page/>

July 2022

Stansted's Roman Secrets

Stansted Mountfitchet has its origins in the medieval period, but there were earlier Romano-British settlements in the area. Saffron Walden Museum preserves some clues left by these small Romano-British communities.

The Parish Church of St Mary occupies the site of a substantial Roman 'villa' building. There are records of Roman pottery and building materials being found in the churchyard in the 19th century. When the Church underwent restoration in 1888, remains of a tessellated floor were found. The contractor Mr Glasscock saved a piece and gave it to the Museum in 1919. The Museum also has pieces of Roman roof and box-flue tiles collected in the churchyard by J J Green in 1891. Box-flue tiles formed flues which vented the hot air from underfloor heating up through the walls.



Mr Green also recovered much Romano-British pottery from a site off Limekiln Lane. The pottery which he gave to the Museum appears to come from a typical farmstead or small settlement, not as well-to-do as the villa on the Church's site.

A Roman silver ring (pictured left), set with an engraved glass paste gem, was found near Stansted in 2016 by a researcher and detectorist. The ring dates to AD 200 – 300 and the tiny engraving on the gem shows a metalworker at an anvil. He could be either Vulcan, the god of fire or Daedalus, a mythical craftsman and father of Icarus. Saffron Walden Museum acquired the ring through the Treasure Act.

August 2022
Akan weights and boxes
Chosen by Jenny Oxley

August's Object of the Month chosen by Jenny Oxley, Collections Officer (Human History) is a collection of weights and boxes from the museum's world cultures collections. This section of the museum's collections are not as well known and we are trying to research and document these collections more fully.

These weights were used as a measuring system by the Akan people of West Africa, for weighing out gold dust, as a form of currency, prior to the introduction of paper money and coins. They are referred to locally as "mrammou".

Weights dating from the 15th to the 17th centuries tend to be basic block shapes decorated with simple geometric patterns, whilst later versions tend to be more figurative in style, as they have been made in the form of familiar everyday objects, such as plants, animals, buildings or people. Some designs had very specific meanings, for example a shield shape denoted bravery and stamina.

Based on the Islamic weight system, each weight had a known value. This provided merchants with secure and fair-trade arrangements with one another. The status of a man increased significantly if he owned a complete set of weights.

Often newly wedded men were gifted a full set of these weights to enable them to successfully enter the merchant trade. The sets of weights varied in size from 12 weights to more than 50. As well as having a practical function it is believed that the weights also represented cultural stories, riddles, and codes of conduct (particularly those promoting equality and justice) that were intended to help guide the Akan people. The weights were originally meticulously carved and then cast using the lost wax technique, but as their functional use declined they began to be mass-produced for tourists. It is estimated that there are now around 3 million Akan gold weights in museums and private collections around the world.

Chiefs and notables stored gold dust in these delicate cast-brass containers, which were modelled after prototypes from North Africa, that had been brought to Ghana during its early involvement with the trans-Saharan gold trade.



rectangular box, used by the Akan people to store gold dust. It is made from cast copper alloy and has a geometric triangular design, with the figures of 8 birds on the lid. Pre-1910

Exhibitions - Current and Previous:

Saturday 16 July – Sunday 31 October 2022

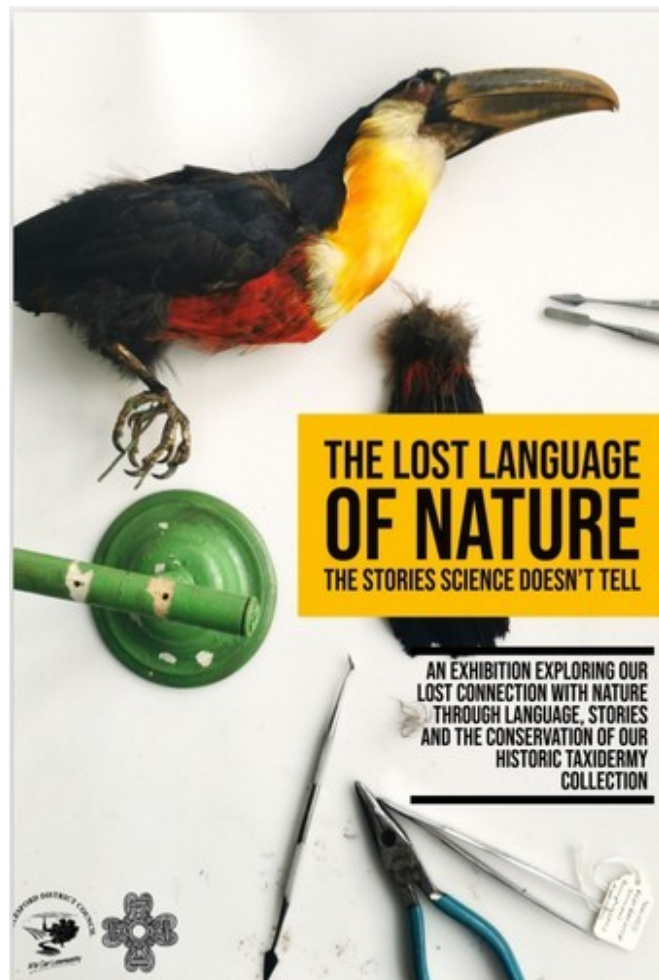
Special Exhibition – “The Lost Language of Nature”

Lost Language of Nature will bring stories of animals and nature from around the world to Saffron Walden Museum. Part of a year-long project to begin to recognise and discuss the global origins of the museum's taxidermy items and to respect, share and record their international stories through community work and exhibitions. The focus of our community work is to collect both local and international stories and cultural information about our taxidermy specimens from the public.

The show features newly conserved taxidermy specimens, some of which have not been out of storage for over 20 years. Visitors can see the diverse habitats in which these birds live across the world and discover some of the language and folklore which they have inspired.

Visitors will be able to catch glimpses of some of the physical conservation work in action, as the exhibition will feature a mini conservation studio.

The public will also be invited to share their own stories through the course of the exhibition through interactive displays, surveys and a community art project.



All Fired Up! Exhibition Ran April - July 2022



Essex Fire Museum & Saffron Walden Museum collaborated to create a unique exhibition about the history of firefighting in Essex.

The exhibits included a wide range of artefacts, photographs, uniforms and equipment which trace the history of firefighting from Victorian times to the present day. It also featured private and works' fire brigades, which were particularly prominent in Essex during the 20th century.

Along with discovering some of the technological developments which have influenced firefighting, visitors were also able to discover heroic stories of bravery and the human stories behind some of the major incidents which occurred in the county's history.

The exhibition touched upon some of the more obscure aspects of local fire-fighting history, including a troupe of fire-fighting scouts, a famous fire-fighting vicar and the story of how an obscure family pet caused a local mansion to go up in flames.

Linked to the All Fired Up exhibition here are some stories about historic local fire incidents:

The Great Fire at Little Chesterford

On the 7th April 1914, a fire broke out at Bordeaux farm in the parish of Littlebury. Newspaper reports at the time suggested that in high winds, sparks from a traction engine caught light to some dry thatch. The flames rang along the river path to Little Chesterford and then spread rapidly across the village. Many of the timber framed thatched properties were burnt to the ground whilst the ones built using clunch (chalk bedded in rammed powered chalk) fared better.

The fire also highlighted the lack of effective fire-fighting equipment and poor communication that existed between local fire fighters. Littlebury had no fire pump, whilst Little Chesterford had only a small portable one for estate purposes. The closest fire engine was based at the Mill in Great Chesterford, but it took over half an hour to attend once the alarm had been raised. The Saffron Walden brigade was hampered in its efforts to attend, as they reportedly “lost their coal on the journey to the fire.” Eventually additional brigades from Hinxton, Audley End estate and Sawston attended as well as the police, but the response had sadly come too late to save many of the properties.

Within 30 minutes of the fire starting it had already destroyed 2 farms, 2 pubs (The Crown and The Bushel & Strike) and 9 houses, leaving 43 out of 100 villagers homeless. The fire had taken everyone by surprise and spread so quickly that the alarm had been raised too late to make a difference. The town’s labourers working in the fields saw the fire spreading at huge speed, they returned home to find their wives and children making frantic efforts to save themselves and their belongings.



Newspaper reports from the time tell the dramatic story of 100 year old Mrs Law who was rescued from her burning first floor room by Stacey Dyer and her son, who lifted her into a wheelbarrow and got her quickly to safety. Stacey Dyer was reportedly scarred on his face for the rest of his life following his heroism. It must have been pandemonium as villagers and their animals ran from the flames. One baby was missing for 2 hours before it was found safe.

Photographs show the village roads strewn with salvaged furniture and crowds gathering shocked by the scale of the fire and how quickly it had spread. The landlady of the Bushel and Strike (Pampisford Brewery) hastily prepared a shed so that they could continue to serve drinks to their shell-shocked customers. A fire relief committee was established and the village reading room was used as a shelter for the homeless and store for their surviving belongings. A fundraising campaign was advertised in the Daily Mail Newspaper. However, not everyone appreciated outside help, with Reverend John Stewart, vicar of both Chesterfords quoted in a subsequent edition of the newspaper as saying:

“We’re a proud people and like to help ourselves. Tell all the kind people who want to send money that we thank them, but do not need their help.”

Cheques from the Daily Mail campaign were reportedly returned to their senders! Archive material suggests local gentry stepped in and helped with the rebuilding work and financial loss. Lessons were learnt following the fire, as all the local brigades vowed to work on better communication and to pool resources.

Easton Lodge – major fires in 1847 and 1918

The gardens, grounds and estate of Easton Lodge, Little Easton, close to Dunmow, date back to Tudor times. In 1590, they were granted to Henry Maynard who later built a house there.

In 1847 a disastrous fire broke out in the mansion at 3 a.m., destroying almost all of the Elizabethan parts of the building. Lord Viscount Maynard (Lord-Lieutenant of Essex), his wife, Lady Maynard, their daughter, the Honourable Miss Maynard and their servants attempted to halt the spread of the fire using sections of carpet and buckets of water, but it was in vain.

Despite having the estate's small fire engine and the Thaxted engine onsite they were unable to put the fire out. Their efforts to call for more assistance were hampered when they found the alarm bell rope tangled and unable to be used. Thankfully everyone was safe. The collections of books, paintings and fine furniture were salvaged and the horses were moved to safety. However, so many features of the original house such as the old turret clock were lost forever. After the fire it was discovered that although the estate's farms had been insured, the mansion and its contents were not. The house was rebuilt in brick and stucco in the Victorian Gothic style to the designs of Thomas Hopper, in what turned out to be his last commission before his death.

In 1865, the Easton Lodge estate was inherited by 3-year-old Frances 'Daisy' Maynard, following the deaths of her father and grandfather. She went on to marry Lord Brooke (who later became the Earl of Warwick). The couple chose to live the majority of their time at Easton Lodge, rather than in their London home.

In 1918, there was yet another major fire at Easton Lodge. One of Daisy's pet monkeys fell ill and was wrapped in a blanket and taken into the night nursery. It sat on the stove for extra warmth and the blanket subsequently caught fire. The monkey panicked and ran around the room with the burning blanket in its wake, igniting the curtains and upholstery. The Dunmow Fire Brigade was called out. Unfortunately, the fire spread so quickly that the private quarters in the west wing, the kitchen and the servant's quarters were all gutted by fire, with the loss of numerous letters and papers belonging to the Countess, but thankfully there was no loss of either human or animal life!

After this fire, the couple employed the architect, Philip Tilden, who designed Selfridges in Oxford Street, to plan the re-build. The west wing was constructed as a separate building, becoming what was later known as Lady Warwick's Great Room (this is now the present Warwick House, home of the Creasey family from 1971-2010). However, the Countess' finances were in a downward spiral, and many of Tilden's elaborate plans for Easton Lodge never came to fruition. The majority of the estate was sold to cover her debts around 1919.

Illustrations:



The print of an engraving of Easton Lodge completed by Henry Adlard, after an image drawn by W Bartlett which was published in 1832 by George Virtue.



Print showing Easton Lodge after the fire of 1847, it shows a fire engine which probably belonged to the estate.

Museum Society News

Membership

Thank you to all of you that have paid your subscriptions promptly.

If you have yet to pay, direct payment can be made by either contacting Christine Sharpe on 01799 527546 or by cheque, made payable to 'Saffron Walden Museum Society Ltd' and posted directly to the Museum or popped through the letterbox for collection. Please remember to clearly mark any correspondence 'Membership'.

If you know of someone who would like to join the Society, application forms may be downloaded from our website www.swmuseumsoc.org.uk . Paper copies are available at the Museum.

If you have any membership queries, please get in touch at either saffronwaldenms@gmail.com or 07790 620 374.

Catherine Peacock

Reports on Talks

14th March 2022

Thomas Cook and the Origins of Popular Tourism

Speaker - Paul Smith a Zoom talk; Host, Richard Priestley

This is a compact version of Paul Smith's talk about Thomas Cook and his original idea of organised day trips that became fully grown package holidays and how the business was carried on by, first, his son and then his three grandsons.

This remarkable man, founder of popular tourism, with very little backing, came up with the thought of holidays with a purpose and which were also educational. He was born in 1808 in Melbourn, Derbyshire. His father, a labourer, died when he was three and after his mother remarried, his stepfather died only a little later. His mother took him out of school when he was 10 and found him a job as a gardener; when he was 14, he was apprenticed to his uncle as a wood turner and when that was completed he became a cabinet maker. Brought up in a Baptist family, at 17 he was formally baptised and subsequently gave up his work and travelled in the East Midlands, praying with people, preaching The Word and delivering tracts for as long as his funds held out. Returning to his work as a turner, he set up in another village, Baradon in Rutland, where he met and married Marianne Mason. Moving to the larger village of Market Harborough, where his son John was born, they both discovered the Temperance Movement which was against the consumption of alcohol and the evils it brought about but said that people should drink less, work hard and do good things so that society as a whole would be better off.

One day in 1841, while walking from Market Harborough to a temperance meeting in Leicester, he had an idea; he would utilise the new railway network to take people on trips and promote the temperance movement – he would use trains to take people to an event in Loughborough 12 miles away in 4 weeks time. The committee agreed and asked Thomas to arrange it so he went to the Midland Railway Company and explained what he wanted to do and he hired a train! This train was to take the supporters to Loughborough for a return trip at the cost of one shilling. It was highly successful and other Temperance Societies, Sunday Schools and so on asked him to arrange trips for them which he did, gaining useful experience. He also moved again, this time to Leicester where by this time he set up as a printer, stationer and bookseller.

In 1845 he arranged a trip for Baptist passengers, taking them from Leicester, Nottingham and Derby to Liverpool! This was a far more complicated task as he had to deal with three railway companies but he managed it. The cost of a single ticket this time was 1st class 15/-, 2nd class 10/- and an extra 4/- for a steam ship trip to Wales. Passengers had to find their own food and accommodation over the next day or two. He also



Thomas Cook - Image from
Wikimedia Commons

printed a handbook for 60 pence. The trip created a sensation, 1200 people booked and Thomas had to arrange a second trip for another 800. He escorted both trips. On the first he took 350 to Wales and some of these to Mount Snowdon and while on the top there, he looked north and saw Scotland, and, inspired, decided that that was the destination for his next trip. These Liverpool trips made a profit.

Scotland happened in 1846 and to get there they took the train to Fleetwood, a steamer to Ardrossan, a special train to Glasgow, where they had a great reception, and then on to Edinburgh for another reception. The cost was seven guineas for 7 nights, travel only. While there, Thomas fell in love with Scotland and its scenery, returned and devised a series of "circular tours" that is, the travel there and back was arranged and you could in addition stay and join a circular tour with Thomas as tour manager. In the next ten years he took thousands of people to Scotland and in 1849 he took his first tour to Ireland.

In 1851 Joseph Paxton was very busy arranging The Great Exhibition to be held in The Crystal Palace in London. Now it so happened that he was also a director of The Midland Railway Company and he asked Thomas to arrange some special trains to bring people to the Exhibition from various parts of the country; Thomas would get a commission on the number of passengers carried. This he did and made a success of it, travelling to and fro with some help from son John, now 17. He had just started printing The Excursion Advertiser but was so busy with trains he only issued 5 editions. But when the Exhibition finished in October the publication became a regular and lasted 88 years up to WWII. It gave details of destinations, routes and other information, in English first and then in other languages when it appeared as 'The Travellers Gazette' for Cook's Excursions.

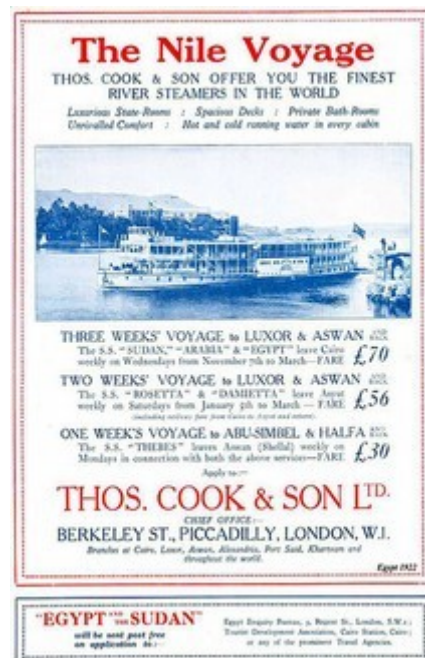
The French had their equivalent Exhibition in 1855 so Thomas started working on that. The English Channel steamship companies refused to co-operate so he turned to the Great Eastern Railway and used their Harwich to Antwerp route and called the trip a Grand Tour and took his passengers through various countries and on a trip down The Rhine finishing in Paris. Fixing things in the continent had its difficulties; Thomas spoke no French but he did make some contacts including a French hotelier and his next idea was to combine travel and some accommodation as "a package holiday"

In 1862 Thomas had to think up new ideas and in 1863 he took a tour to Switzerland. This country was not known as a holiday destination apart from one for a few winter skiers, but the tour took 63 people to Geneva, travel only, and onwards around the country with a group of 10. One of these, 'Miss Jemima' kept a well written and illustrated diary which got her well known especially in Switzerland. When Thomas returned the next year with holiday makers on some of his round trips he found that he, too, was well known to the Swiss hoteliers. In 1864, using the Paris-Lyon-Mediterranean railway he escorted a tour over the Alps to Florence and by 1868 had escorted a tour to Pompeii – illustrated by a photo which showed the Victorian visitors dressed formally in their best clothes, as tourists of that era were wont to do.

Going back to 1865, he, partnered by son John, had decided to move the business/HQ to premises in Fleet Street in London which had a ticket office on the ground floor and other facilities on several stories above it. They had an assistant, a messenger boy and Marianne, his wife and their daughter, Fanny, lent a hand. This was their total workforce. Of the two men, Thomas was the enthusiastic philanthropist who came up with many of the fresh ideas and John the far more business minded.

In 1865 Thomas checked out North America and southern Canada and in 1866 John conducted a tour there but had to renegotiate all the arrangements that had been made as the contacts would not honour them. (This tour did not make a profit but the business persevered and they opened an office in New York in 1873.)

By now the firm was also a ticket agent for independent travellers and offered tickets that included half-board accommodation and a list of hotels where they could be used therefore acting as a travel agent not just a tour operator. Then in 1868 came a tour to The Holy Land with a party of 32 travellers on two Nile Steamers and overnight "glamping" for four weeks. This arrangement was very expensive and aimed at well off people – John's idea – rather than working class clients - for they were accompanied by



Source: Wikimedia Commons

support staff to manage the tents, do the catering and cope with the luggage. These tours were profitable. 1868 – 69 was the trip to the opening of The Suez Canal and Thomas was on the first boat through!

In 1872 the conducted World Tours started for by this time east and west coasts of America had been linked by railways and the rest of the countries visited were by steam ship and the Suez Canal was open. When Thomas conducted a tour he went westwards and John would go eastwards. Later the three grandsons escorted some tours and it was opened to independent travellers. First class travel and accommodation cost £300:00. When on these tours, Thomas wrote back home to Temperance and Baptist publications, to The Times and to his wife generating good publicity. In 1873, when Thomas was off round the world, John took the business to a huge new building in Ludgate Circus – where it stayed for 53 years – but had a serious disagreement with Thomas over the mortgage he had taken out to build it. The sum was in fact repaid in 3 years from the firm's profits. Its address was "Thomas Cook's, London". Then came 'Thomas Cook's Continental Timetables – a tourist Handbook' which sold very well and not just to their customers. Then in 1874 came 'The Guide Book to Switzerland' to be followed by others. They also launched 'Cook's circular notes' and travellers cheques for, say, £5 or £10 (quite a lot) which could be exchanged at Thomas Cook offices and at some hotels or banks. So activity in the last quarter of the C19th transformed the business of the travel industry, making sure there were attractions for the aristocracy as well as other passengers.

The business was conducted largely by personal contact/travel or by letter but managed to achieve a thoroughly worthy reputation to the extent that in 1884 it was asked by the government of the day to assist in the rescue of General Gordon from Khartoum. John took on 27 Nile Steamers and smaller vessels and huge numbers of people but when the rescue failed the government tried to lay the blame on him as a scapegoat. It cost John a lot so he decided to build his own fleet, the first steamer being available in 1886 and after 10 years there were around 40. They made so much use of the Suez Canal that it got known as 'Cook's Canal' as it took mail as cargo as well as Cook's passengers.

Then there was the question of bringing people to London in for the Queen's Jubilees 1887 and 1897 including Indian Princes who were eventually allocated their own 'Indian Princes' department which helped to give the business the experience to bring people to the 1896 London Olympic Games. Then in 1898 the German Kaiser wanted a trip to The Holy Land and John arranged a 38-day tour which was an immense task but gained massive publicity for the company. But, alas it took place at the wrong time to go, October and November, when the weather was wholly unsuitable. But it cost £43,000! The other cost was to John's health as he contracted dysentery and failed to fully recover, dying the following year in March when his three sons took over, taking the business forward by, for instance using charabancs for some trips at home and abroad and, post WWI introducing some flying trips.

As to Thomas, he had slowed down after 1872 and retired in 1878 and returned to Leicester where he built a big house for his retirement. But it was not a happy place for him; possibly as the result of a leaky gas water heater, his daughter Annie was found dead in her bath not long after they had moved in. Marianne did not really recover from this and died four years later. For his 80th birthday, Thomas took a group of his Temperance and Baptist friends to Egypt for a holiday. He was, though, too ill to attend the celebration of 50th anniversary of Cook's Tours and died the next year in 1892.

From organising a day return to Loughborough by train to people being able to walk into a Thomas Cook's office anywhere in the world and buy a ticket to anywhere was some astonishing achievement. I can remember a slogan used in the very latter days of the company. "Don't just book it, Thomas Cook it!". The omissions and mistakes in this resumé are mine, the astonishing story belongs to Thomas Cook and the Cook family.

Heather Salvidge

13 June 2022

THAXTED -A Late Medieval Commercial Town

Speaker: Richard Till

Richard's talk examined how Thaxted in the 14th and 15th centuries developed as a major cutlery producing centre and the social consequences of this growth.



Bone knife handle fragments



Thaxted Guildhall

These web pages tell some of the story of Thaxted's history >>>

Thaxted - Ten Centuries of History

<https://www.thaxted.co.uk/index.php/tourism/ten-centuries-of-history>

Thaxted - Short History of Thaxted

<https://www.thaxted.co.uk/index.php/tourism/ten-centuries-of-history/short-history-of-thaxted>

Editor's Note

As we no longer have a Recorder to take notes during the talks for later publication in the Newsletter, only a brief summary of each talk can now be given.
A volunteer to take notes of our talks is still sought, and if you are willing to volunteer please contact our Talks arranger: Paul Salvidge on 01279 814153

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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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