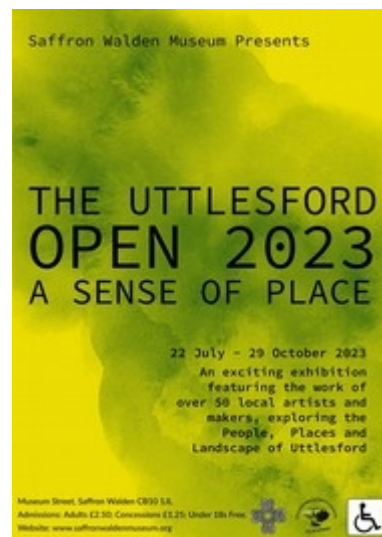


Newsletter of Saffron Walden Museum Society Ltd

Summer 2023 Issue 60

In this Issue

- 1 Highlights and Happenings; From the Chairman
- 2 Curators Column;
- 4 Natural Sciences News: Sarah Kenyon, Natural Sciences Officer
- 4 Natural Sciences: James Lombard, Natural Sciences Officer
- 5 Art at Saffron Walden Museum: Charlotte Pratt
- 6 Collections Officer, Human History : Jenny Oxley
- 10 Object of the Month
- 12 Exhibitions and Upcoming Events:
- 12 Volunteer News: Wendy-Jo Atter
- 15 Museum Shop
- 15 Museum Society News
- 15 Membership
- 15 Reports on Talks
- 17 Who to contact . . .



Highlights and Happenings; From the Chairman

You may well be familiar with the phrase “Content is King” a quote first written in an essay by Bill Gates in 1996 when he wrote;

“*Content is where I expect much of the real money will be made on the Internet, just as it was in broadcasting*” – Bill Gates

Over the last 20 years we have had a huge increase in what is available to watch and, indeed a change in where we can all watch it. The young have long given up the television screen for the laptop and more recently the smartphone.

All this activity makes what Museums exhibit increasingly competitive, and this makes the job of our hard working and talented staff, and of our great band of volunteers, ever more difficult to succeed; but succeed they do. It was a delight therefore to attend their Volunteers Tea Party to thank them personally and award certificates to note their achievements. The changes that affect the Museum world mean we have to constantly strive to do better and often be different. The “Feeding the Family” spring exhibition was an imaginative way of dealing with one of life’s key tasks through the centuries.

A wholly different innovation was the launch last week of the Uttlesford Open Art Exhibition – “A Sense of Place”. Our records do not reveal when the Museum last held an Art exhibition and not one of the more than 100 guests at the private viewing knew! Do visit and take the opportunity which we have never offered before, to buy the work of 90 artists who competed for the awards kindly donated by judges sculptor Ian Wolter and artist Heath Kane.

Looking further ahead, the Museum development much postponed by Covid and all that is back on the agenda , and work will commence shortly on an application to the National Heritage Lottery Fund , including an additional focus on the Museum's busy outreach programs.

Please may I close by highlighting what is working well and that's our monthly talks, of which we have had four in just over 3 months with ever increasing numbers attending. Thanks to Paul and his helpers in finding speakers and to those who attend.

Curators Column;

Pargetting – a heritage craft to be nurtured

One of the best things about working in museums is the number of interesting and inspirational people you meet. In the last few weeks, we have had food historian Monica Askay showing us how much more there is to salads historically than a few lettuce leaves with tomato and cucumber garnish, and the Uttlesford Open art exhibition is showcasing an amazing range of creative talent from across the district, encouraging us to think of our surroundings in a new light.

This last week of July has seen two special workshops on the traditional craft of pargetting (or pargeting, both spellings are used) attended by a small group of enthusiastic students looking to pursue interests and careers in art, design and architecture. The workshops were instigated by former councillor Paul Fairhurst, who was inspired by Anna Kettle's pargetting demonstration on Saffron Day in October 2022 and have been kindly funded by him and a community grant from the New Homes Bonus Scheme. We were fortunate to engage Bill Sargent and his colleague Andrew from The Pargetting Company <https://pargettingcompany.com/> who in addition to pargetting commissions, provide public demonstrations and workshops on this traditional craft which is such a special feature of our local historic buildings, and (one hopes) will be continue to be used on newer buildings too.



Left; Trying Stampwork



Above; Bill guides students making their own freehand pargetted panels

After an introduction to pargetting and mixing lime plaster, participants tried their hand at stamping designs into plaster, a technique widely used on buildings in and around Saffron Walden. Bill and Andrew then demonstrated

the technique of freehand work, using simple modelling tools and brushes to create an owl or fleur-de-lys design on a plastered board. Students then created their own owl or fleur-de-lys under guidance and everyone went home with a fine piece of pargetting by their own hand. Congratulations to all our workshop participants, whose commitment and excellent work really impressed Bill and Andrew. There was a short item on Anglia TV regional news on Thursday evening 27 July, and we look forward to welcoming The Pargetting Company back on 24 August to give a public demonstration at our Heritage Crafts Day (11am – 3pm Museum grounds, adults £5, under 18s free). Bill and Andrew kindly let the museum keep the demonstration designs they created, including a pargetted Museum logo and Wallace the Lion, which will be on display on Heritage Crafts Day.



Andrew puts the finishing touches to an owl



Fleur-de-lys motif

Meanwhile Anna Kettle, who has been researching local pargetting and the Museum's collection of pargetting stamps, has produced some short You-tube videos on the internet to introduce pargetting to a wider audience. Whether or not you managed to catch Anna's talk to the Society earlier this year, you may like to have a look at her You-tube channel at the range of recent and previous videos she has made https://www.youtube.com/results?search_query=anna+kettle+pargetting

Museum development

For our long-term development plans, I have now been round the Museum and site several times with different companies specialising in 2D and 3D surveys using all the power and speed of digital technology to produce plans, elevations and photographic surveys. With quotes now in hand, I will be taking these to the Museum Society and Council to decide how we proceed next. It is fascinating to find out what the technology can do, and how quickly, but we may need to wait for the end of the bird nesting season and autumn leaf-fall, as surveys apparently work better when the leaves are off the trees and plant life has died back a little.

Natural Sciences News: Sarah Kenyon, Natural Sciences Officer

The verge volunteers and I have been out doing ecological surveys at the Special Roadside Verges in Uttlesford. What a difference a year makes, and the position of the jet stream! Last year there were record breaking hot temperatures in July and plants shrivelled up in the baking heat. This July 2023 the jet stream is over Britain bringing lower temperatures and wet weather. I have been dodging showers instead of the sun. Each year we aim to survey the botanical condition of half the 46 verges, however, due to unfortunate circumstances only three verge reps were able to conduct ecological surveys this year. Thank you to members of the Saffron Walden Wildflower Group who helped by surveying some of the 23 verges.



One of our wonderful chalk flower verges

Behind the scenes I am planning the removal of the last three cases of birds from the Inorganics store. At the Museum Store I started to document the non-flowering plant collections of algae, fungi, lichens, mosses and liverworts in preparation for an exhibition next year.

Natural Sciences: James Lombard, Natural Sciences Officer

Saffron Walden Rocks

The geology display in the grounds now has its new information panel. It uses colour-coded headings to distinguish local from non-local rock types and covers 200 million years of history including how the rocks formed and how they came to be in Saffron Walden.

Making space

The old Inorganics store is now a much more useful space, thanks to the help of several capable volunteer colleagues during the Volunteers' Tea Party in June. We organised items on the shelves and cleared rubbish with a view to moving the shelving and creating a workable space for hands-on collection work.



Collections Care

Following grant funding from AIM Pilgrim Trust, we welcomed freelance natural history conservator Lucie Mascord to the Museum in May to give recommendations on short-term improvements and long-term ideals for the natural sciences store. We look forward to receiving her full report in July.

The same store has also seen large numbers of woodlice in 2023. They aren't a pest in themselves but show that the store is less well sealed than we would like. Investigations of the doors and vestibule leading to the store led to further gaps being filled, and a significant reduction in woodlouse numbers since the spring.

Museum and Castle grounds

We hope you're enjoying the informal meadow around the Castle again this summer, with paths and picnic areas mown in. Several species of butterfly frequent the un-mown areas, and it is wonderful to see new wildflowers springing up. The wooden planters near the tennis courts are also attracting their fair share of pollinators.



Marjoram in the Museum grounds

Art at Saffron Walden Museum: Charlotte Pratt

Kicking off a Summer of Art

Over the past few months, I have been busy preparing for the Museum's first open call art exhibition "The Uttlesford Open 2023: A Sense of Place". Artists, aged over 18 who are living, working, or studying in Uttlesford or within 20 miles of Saffron Walden Museum were invited to submit artworks on the theme of "A Sense of Place: People, Places and Landscape of Uttlesford". Entry fees were set at £10 for a single piece of work and £15 for two with concessionary rates also available.



**The Uttlesford Open 2023:
A Sense of Place
22nd of July to
29th of October**



Doing anything new is always a bit of a risk and this project was no different, there was a risk that we would not have enough submissions or that the submissions would not be of good enough quality, but I am pleased to report that thankfully this was not the case!

We received over 90 entries from over 60 different artists and makers from across the district. Our guest judges Ian Wolter and Heath Kane were impressed by the quality of the submissions. Ian and Heath selected winners and highly commended in the following categories: best 2D, best 3D, best response to theme and most creative response. Heath and Ian also generously commissioned trophies for the winners.

The exhibition opened with a busy private view on Friday 21st of July, where the winners were presented with their prizes. The exhibition will run until the end of October so there is plenty of time to see it if you couldn't make the private view. The exhibition is part of the Museum's wider summer of art which also includes the "Wild about Walden" art trail as well as a full program of summer activities for families.

“Wild about Walden” -is an art trail of large lion sculptures dotted around Saffron Walden town centre, at places of cultural and historical significance. Each lion has been decorated by a school, community group, organisation or by the public.

There is also a ‘pride’ of smaller lions on display in shop windows. Saffron Walden Community Shed kindly made the lions on behalf of the Museum. Saffron Walden Community Shed is a charity which provides local people a place to gather, make and mend things, undertake DIY-type projects, drink tea and relax as well as combating loneliness.

There is an accompanying “Wild about Walden” map trail which would-be lion spotters can use to locate the lions and find out information about the different venues, businesses and groups involved in the project. The trail is running from Saturday 22nd of July to Tuesday 5th of September.



Collections Officer, Human History : Jenny Oxley

Greater in Spirit, Larger in Outlook Project

Jenny, Collections Officer (Human History) & Alice Lodge, Collections Connector (project assistant) are continuing to work through the planning and preparation work for the project’s exhibition opening at Epping Forest District Museum in September and are establishing links with relevant community groups. The team of staff and volunteers from Epping Forest Museum visited SW Museum in April to view the world cultures collections in storage and on display and discussed the collections care and ethical issues surrounding caring for world cultures collections.

Your Stories: Community Showcase

The Hidden History Project: A special exhibition by The Lodge On display from May until August 2023.

In this display, you will find an intriguing array of different items, information, and stories. You will also get a sneak peek into the process that brought these items together!

Earlier this year, a group of young people and facilitators from The Lodge - a consent-based, self-directed learning community based in Saffron Walden - formed a collaboration with the Museum. They went to the off-site



museum store twice, to explore the collection, and to see what they could find behind the scenes. Once they had 'maggied' their items and areas of interest, they dug further into what they were, why they were drawn to them, and what they meant to them. They played with diverse ways of interpreting and exploring their thoughts and connection to the items, including writing fictional stories about them, creating artwork inspired by them, finding out more about their contexts and histories, and reflecting on how they provoked their own thoughts and feelings.

Collections Care Audits

In April, university students Eleanor, Elizabeth and Katie joined us to help inventory the ceramic and glassware store behind the scenes at the museum. Eleanor is continuing with working on the audit of the ceramic and glassware collections project until she starts back at University in September.



Behind the scenes at the Museum, a small section of the ceramics and glassware store. Ceramic stand and bottles, front view and underside view, chosen by volunteer Eleanor Cadogan. Teapot, also chosen by the ceramics store volunteers as one of the items they liked the best. © Saffron Walden Museum

Work continues behind the scenes auditing, cataloguing and repacking a number of other collections as well. We have a student volunteer working through the stored ceramics collection. Collections Officer (Human History) Jenny Oxley is working through the costume and textile collections and lining up volunteers to make up padded hangers and calico bags for the items so they can be hung up instead of boxed up. We've also been successful in securing a grant from SHARE for a 1-day conservator review of the world cultures collections on display and in storage. Preparation and research work has also started on the museum's firearm collection to audit and prepare them for moving to a new storage location at the museum.

Digital Transformation – website re-design

Jenny took part in the Culture 24 Digital Transformation cohort over the past 6 months. This involved regular seminars as well as completing a series of online modules and 1-2-1 coaching. The training cohort sessions concluded with the museum applying for and being awarded £1,000 from SHARE to spend on digital transformation, which the museum has put towards the cost of re-designing the museum's website. Tela, a local web design agency were the winning bid to do the re-designing and upgrading work. The website content and design have now been completed and we are in the last stages of usability testing before we update the domains and hosting and make the new version of the website live.

Evacuee Exhibition Project

From **Saturday 11th November 2023 until March 2024**, the museum will exhibit the original artwork of author and artist Brian "Sandy" Sanders. Scenes of Saffron Walden and the district from his two books, *Evacuee: A Wartime Childhood* (2010) and *Return of Evacuee: A Postwar childhood* (2016) will dominate the exhibition, accompanied by wartime items and photographs from the museum's collections. Visitors will be able to explore the second world war context and the lived experiences of evacuees who came to live in Saffron Walden and Uttlesford during that time, such as Sandy.

Sandy's original artwork features well known places in the town including Bridge End Gardens, St. Mary's Church, Bridge House, the 8 Bells pub and the Boys British School, as well as venues of the time which no longer exist or are much transformed such as the isolation hospital, cinema and public baths, which many will remember.



The exhibition will also provide an opportunity for us to address the experiences of those who have come to Saffron Walden and Uttlesford as modern-day refugees, as a result of ongoing conflicts around the world. The exhibition will be accompanied by craft activity events and an interactive activity table. Sandy will give a public talk & Q&A about his life and work. We are planning to produce a Community Town Trail (self-guided tour map) capturing moments and places from around the town from the books. We are also exploring working with community arts group Chicken Shed to explore the possibility of drama workshops based around the books.

Beyond the exhibition, Sandy's artworks will remain in the museum's collections along with the recorded memories and experiences of Second world war evacuees and modern-day refugees who have come to the town and surrounding villages in the district.

Recent Events

Temporary Exhibition: Feeding the Family Ran from 1st April – 9th July 2023

Researched and compiled by Carolyn and Jenny, this exhibition showcased the history of food preparation and food serving from Roman times to the present day.

Throughout history, people have laboured to put food on the table. The Museum draws on its own collections and historical sources to see what local families might have been preparing and eating over the last 2,000 years. Food is always a major topic and these days more so than ever. Affordability, supply, diet and environmental sustainability are all in the news. We wanted to explore how our meals and food fashions have changed throughout history.

Visitors to the exhibition had the chance to see original recipes as well as typical dishes and tableware from each time-period. To accompany the display there were also mystery food smells to identify, and plates to decorate with a picture of a favourite meal.

In conjunction with this exhibition, the museum partnered with Uttlesford Foodbank to help our visitors learn more about their vital work, helping local residents who are struggling to afford to feed their families.

Taste of History event: Demonstration and tasting of salad through the ages
Held on Wednesday 12th July, 6.30-8.30pm

Cook and Food Historian Monica Askay taught the group about salads of the past and their varied and perhaps surprising ingredients. This was a cookery demonstration with tastings. Salads from 3 different periods were featured ----- a medieval Herb and Flower Salat, A 17th Century Grand Sallet, and a Georgian Salamagundy. It was an opportunity to find out about the ingredients used, and to taste the salads which were very different from each other and were very much of their time periods.

The ticket included wine, soft drinks and a handout on salads from medieval times to WW2. It was a fun way to inspire people to create their own historically informed salads at home.

Making space

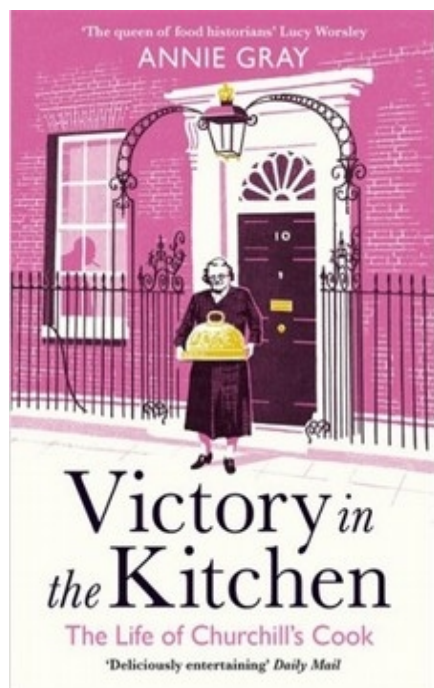
The Volunteers' Tea Party (See Volunteer News section below)was a great success, and the activities at the end made good use of even more volunteer help, especially in clearing and tidying the old Inorganics store. A very big thank you to Liz and Jerry (pictured with James Lumbard) , Jane and Ann for their heavy lifting and organisational work. This room is now well on its way to being a large, open area to research and work on items in the collection, with space to store display furniture and packing materials.



Council Garden Party

The council's garden party event was held in the museum grounds on Friday 23 June. Refreshments were provided and there were garden games to play. It was a lovely opportunity to bring all the staff together to socialise, given that everyone works in different departments and across different sites.

Victory in the Kitchen



Aligning nicely with our recent exhibition, Feeding the Family this 'Deliciously Entertaining' book is the story of a woman who was not a royal, not rich, not famous; someone who simply worked hard and enjoyed her life. But while Georgina Landemare saw herself as ordinary, her accomplishments were anything but.

Georgina started her career as a nursemaid and ended it cooking for one of the best-known figures in British history: Winston Churchill.

To him, food was central, not only as a pleasure but as a diplomatic tool at a time when the world was embroiled in war. With this eager eater and his skilled cook, ranging from rural Berkshire to wartime London, via Belle-epoque Paris and prohibition-era New York, Annie Gray shows how life in service - and food - changed during the huge upheavals of the 20th century."

On sale in the Museum Shop at a very reasonable £9.99

Object of the Month

April 2023
Serpent



April's object of the month is a Serpent, a low-pitched early brass instrument, which became popular in the Renaissance era.

It has a trombone style mouthpiece, but with tone holes like a woodwind instrument. Keys were added in later versions.

They were commonly used from the 17th to the early 19th centuries, although you can still buy them from specialist makers.

Initially they were used to compliment bass parts in choirs, but by the mid-18th century, they began to appear in chamber ensembles, and later in orchestras.

The sound of a serpent is somewhere between a bassoon and a euphonium, and it is typically played in a seated position, with the instrument resting upright on the player's thighs.

The version we are displaying in the museum this month dates to the 1830s and was played in St Mary's Church in Saffron Walden.

May 2023
Fossil Sponge
Chosen by Sarah Kenyon

May's object of the month is a fossil sponge from Radwinter

Saffron Walden Museum offers a free identification service for objects from north-west Essex. People often find interesting stones in their garden or in fields. Many of these are flint nodules. Flint is a hard rock that comes from chalk, a soft white limestone that is 200 metres thick in north Essex and Cambridgeshire. Chalk was formed as a limy mud on the floor of a tropical sea that once covered most of Britain and north-west Europe during the Cretaceous period 65-145 million years ago. The sea water contained dissolved quartz, or silica, originating from the skeletons of tiny sponges. As the mud was compressed into chalk the silica became concentrated as nodules or layers of flint. When the chalk became exposed as dry land, erosion by rivers released the flint and redeposited it as thick layers of gravel. Flint is often found as brown, iron-stained pebbles. Unweathered nodules, fresh from chalk rock, are black with a white outer surface.



Occasionally flints contain fossils of sea urchins or cockle shells. This circular stone from Radwinter is a Sponge called *Porosphaera globularis* which is fossilised in flint rock. The animal lived in the sea that covered Essex 80 million years ago, during the age of the dinosaurs. The flint has been stained brown by iron in the soil. Circular flint nodules are often fossilised sponges, or they have formed around the nucleus of a sponge. The size can vary, from flints the size of musket balls to nodules the size of cannon balls.

June 2023

Cast skin of a Dragonfly larva

Chosen by James Lombard

June's object of the month chosen by James Lombard, Natural Sciences Officer is the cast skin (exuvia) of a dragonfly larva, found in Elsenham in August 2005.



Dragonfly lava skin © Saffron Walden Museum

The shape of the eyes and the length (40mm) suggest it's a hawker dragonfly, while the finder's description of the adult dragonfly being green and yellow means it is probably a southern hawker, which are common in July and August. These dragonflies spend 2 or 3 years as a larva or nymph living underwater, before coming above water to shed their skin and emerge as an adult.

The process of shedding a skin is called 'ecdysis', and the skin that's left behind is called an 'exuvia'. Ecdysis occurs in spiders, crustaceans and some insects.

Dragonfly nymphs gradually change into adults through a series of moults which also allow it to grow in size, emerging as an adult directly from the last moult. This is different from other insects including flies and butterflies, which have an inactive pupal stage where the body changes entirely from a maggot or caterpillar to the adult.

June 2023

Forgeries in the Museum!

Chosen by Joanne Pegrum, Museum Volunteer (pictured left)



On display in Saffron Walden Museum during July, possibly for the first time since the 19th century, are a group of six lead objects known as 'Billys and Charleys'. The objects appear to be medieval religious objects but they are known to be forgeries with a tale to tell from Victorian London.

Billy (William Smith) and Charley (Charles Eaton), who give their nickname to the objects, were mudlarks. Mudlarks would scour the foreshore of the Thames to find things of value to sell. From the 1840s they were selling the antiquities they had found to antiques dealers, then in the 1850s they turned to profit by deception. Billy and Charley began to fabricate medieval religious objects which they claimed to have found at a development at Shadwell.



Lead medallion 8.5 cm wide, showing two figures mounted on a grazing horse. © Saffron Walden Museum

The volume of these strange medieval objects appearing on the market began to arouse the suspicion of archaeologists and antiquarians but there were conflicting opinions as to their authenticity. Proof of forgery could not initially be established, and so their deception and profiteering continued.



Lead figure 16.3 cm high of a saint holding a scroll and book, and riding a four-legged animal. © Saffron Walden Museum

Exhibitions and Upcoming Events:

Coming soon

Heritage Crafts Day: 24 August, 11am-3pm

Join us for a day of heritage crafts and demonstrations, including pottery, willow weaving, wood working and pargetting. Refreshments available. Adults £5. Under 18s free. Admission charges apply. Get your tickets online now: <https://saffron-walden-museum.arttickets.org.uk/>

Temporary Exhibition: Uttlesford Open 2023

Opens 22 July and runs until 29 October

The Uttlesford Open 2023 is Saffron Walden Museum's first, open call, judged art exhibition. Artists, aged over 18 who are living, working, or studying in Uttlesford or within 20 miles of Saffron Walden Museum have submitted artworks on the theme of "A Sense of Place: The people, places and landscape of Uttlesford".

The entries submitted have now been judged and selected by artists Ian Wolter and Heath Kane. Devised by Charlotte, the exhibition will feature artworks by over 50 local artists and makers, both amateur and professional.

Saturday 16th September, 10.30-4.00pm

Museum Society Second-Hand Book Sale

Visit the museum, peruse the books on offer and pick up a bargain book.

There will also be the option of a free guided tour of the Museum at 11am.

Museum admission fees apply. Don't forget to show your museum society membership card.

If you have books you would like to donate to the museum for the second hand book sale please contact us on (01799) 510333 and ask for Jenny, or email museum@uttlesford.gov.uk. Please provide a brief description of the number of books you are wishing to donate and an overview of their genre, as space is limited.

Volunteer News: Wendy-Jo Atter

Museum holds tea party to thank its many volunteers.

Volunteers who give thousands of hours of their time to support Saffron Walden Museum were thanked for their efforts at a special celebration event.

The museum has 53 volunteers who fill several different roles such as running the welcome desk, sorting and cataloguing human history collections and helping to run the popular learning activities and events. To recognise all they do, the Museum – with the support of Starbucks, Tesco and Waitrose - held a Volunteers' Tea Party on 20 June. As an extra special touch to the event, certificates were also handed out to those volunteers who have clocked up long service to the museum.

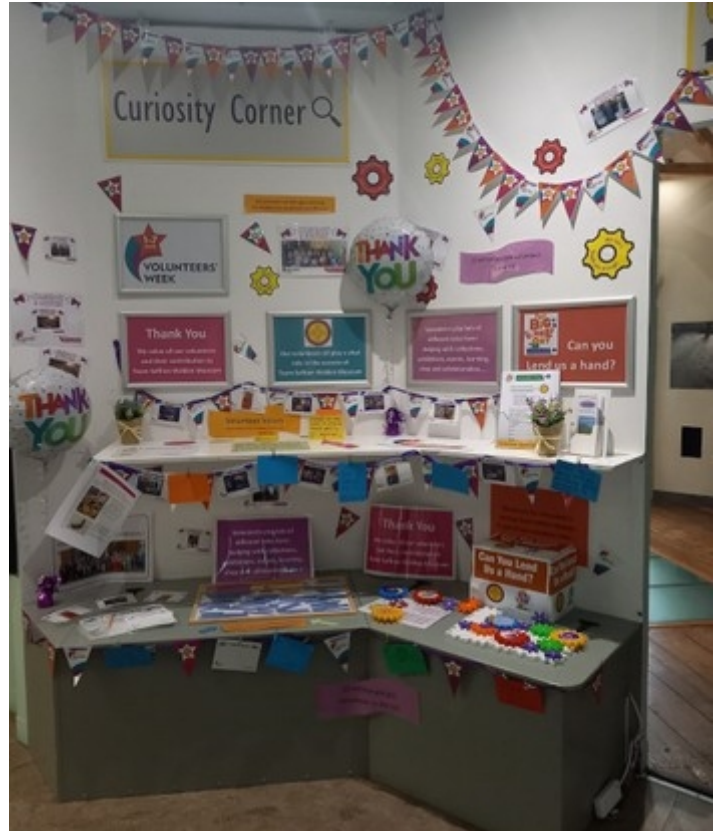
Carolyn Wingfield, the museum Curator, said: "Our heartfelt thanks go to our volunteers who have given more than 2,600 hours of their time in the last year – without this continued commitment and dedication, the museum simply could not offer the opening hours or wide range of community activities that it currently does. We are extremely grateful to them and are delighted to be able to host such a special occasion to thank them properly."



Wendy-Jo and her daughter Anabelle put together a display about the role played by our volunteers in the museum, to celebrate National Volunteer week in June.

The display continued throughout June to coincide with the Volunteer's Tea Party (20th June) and the Council Garden Party (23rd June) being held at the Museum.

The display showed the role volunteers play in our organisation, past and present and how we are looking to develop volunteering here in the future!



Volunteer Anabelle preparing this year's display. Museum Staff Charlotte and Wendy-Jo and artist Brian Sanders promoting the volunteer display.

New volunteers are always very welcome 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.

Volunteer Verge Surveyors

Do you like wildflowers and getting out into the countryside?

We need volunteers to keep an eye on Special Roadside Verges in the district.

Uttlesford is lucky enough to have 46 verges designated for their chalk grassland and rare plants. They are remnants of the wildflower meadows that once covered this area. The verges are cut in March and October or November each year.

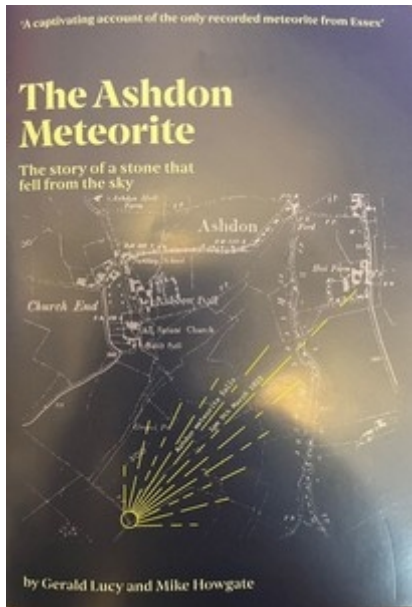
Volunteers check the verges to ensure they have been cut properly and spot if wooden marker posts and plaques are missing. If botany is your passion, we also need help with ecological surveys in summer.

To find out more, please contact Sarah Kenyon on 01799 510641 and skenyon@uttlesford.gov.uk

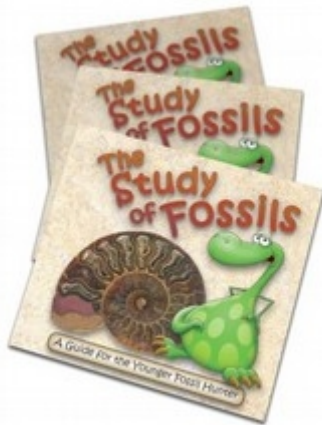
Wendy-Jo Atter

Museum Shop

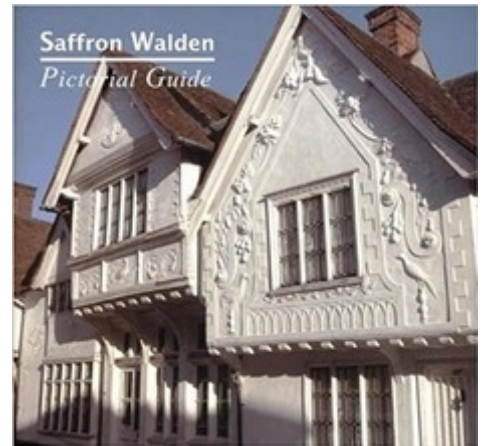
We have a selection of souvenirs and local books available at the Museum Shop , including the following;



“The Ashdon Meteorite” the story of a stone that fell from the sky. A captivating account of the only recorded meteorite from Essex. Which is on sale in the shop for £3



“The Study of Fossils” a wonderful little 25 page colour illustrated booklet which gives any young enthusiast a great deal of information about fossils. On sale in the shop for £1.99.



Our Open Call Art Exhibition, which runs from July until November is themed “A Sense of Place” and the paperback book 'Saffron Walden Pictorial Guide', is on sale at £2.95

Museum Society News

Membership

Membership

- Membership subscription is a minimum of £15 a year and includes,
- Newsletters sent to members three times a year.
- Unlimited free entry to the museum during opening hours – and children get in free, but Special Events may attract a charge.
- A programme of evening talks with wide ranging subjects, currently delivered via Zoom during winter months and live during the other part of the year
- Private viewings before the opening of special exhibitions for you and your guest,
- An Annual Winter Social Evening.
- Annual General Meeting – Attend and vote; have your say in how the Museum Society is run.

Reports on Talks

The Pargeting of Saffron Walden – Recent Discoveries

Speaker; Anna Kettle

17 April 2023

Aнна works as a pargeter for her day job, and has become very concerned about the very few people now working as pargeters, and the lack of new entrants to the profession. She has been studying for a dissertation about pargeting using Saffron Walden as a case study, and has surveyed the historic centre of our town to identify and where possible date the examples that she finds.

Origin of 'parget';
1300–50; Middle English <Middle French pargeter, equivalent to par-per- +
geter, spelling variant of jeter to throw; [from dictionary.com]

Anna was able to show many photographs of the buildings around the town with surviving pargeted sections, and pointed out how careful study of them can reveal how they have been altered in previous years, and in some cases that allows an approximate date to be suggested for them. There is no 'scientific' method of dating a pargeting sample, as they are only composed of lime, chalk and hair which is not dateable. The classic period for pargeting was the 1700s, which Anna calls the 'Golden Age' using lime mortar, and it then went out of fashion, but in Saffron Walden there was a revival in the 1880s associated with a local building company, which used cement mortar in its work. This dries much faster than lime mortar, and sets harder, making it more difficult to mould, so wooden carved stamps were used to press patterns into cement render while it was still wet. Anna has identified a set of stamps which were used on several buildings around the town that date to this period.

The Old Sun Inn is perhaps our most famous pargeted building, and Anna showed how it was altered in the 1800s by Gibson, when the building had fallen into disuse and poor condition, and he was able to renovate it, but much of what we see today only dates to the time of those works, though other sections are much older and date back to the 1700s. Despite many stories that exist about the origin of the 'Giants' prominently facing onto Church Street, the true story of the origin of these figures is not known.



Anna has her own website at www.kettlenet.co.uk, which is very informative, and is in the process of making a set of videos about pargeting, which will soon be put onto YouTube as instructional tools to keep the techniques alive for the future.

More Reading; <https://heritagecrafts.org.uk/pargeting/>
Old Sun Inn; <http://oldsuninn.com/>

Tony Morton

Henry Winstanley, the last renaissance engineer
Speaker; Martin Rose
15 May 2023

Martin Rose has spent many years looking at the life of Henry Winstanley, and will soon be publishing a book that tells the story. Perhaps best known for building the first Eddystone lighthouse, he was an accomplished engraver, and ingenious inventor of many mechanical and water powered machines. A remarkable man.

More Reading; Hundred Parishes website ; <https://www.hundredparishes.org.uk/people/detail/henry-winstanley>

Buildings and burials: evidence of Roman life in Bishops Stortford
Speaker; Elizabeth Duru
June 12 2023

A recent discovery in Bishops Stortford has been made as the result of excavations carried out by Oxford Archaeology on the land adjacent to the Grange Paddocks sports centre, in parkland alongside the River Stort. The land was proposed for development of sports pitches, and a previous study by Hertfordshire Archaeological Trust (HAT) carried out in 2001 indicated the presence of Roman archaeological deposits ;

(Ed; see https://archaeologydataservice.ac.uk/archiveDS/archiveDownload?t=arch-1352-1/dissemination/pdf/Herts_grey_lit_reports/GL3027_Grange_Paddocks_Evaluation.pdf)

Whenever development is proposed and initial investigations show that underground archaeological features exist, the development has to fund rescue digs to investigate and record what may be present. Two separate digs have been undertaken here, in 2019 to the south of the sports building, and in 2022 to the north and east of the building, and Elizabeth Duru was involved in the second excavation.

It was known that Stane Street, the Roman road between Colchester and St. Albans, ran across this land and had a crossing point of the River Stort nearby, but the exact nature of any Roman use of the site was not known. All

that has changed with the discovery of a large roadside settlement, only part of which has been uncovered. The archaeological work found 500 Kilogrammes of pottery which is an unusually large quantity, 2000 metal artefacts, a shrine consisting of a square foundation of flint stones which would have supported a timber framed building set within a fenced enclosure, evidence of metal working, several bread ovens, streets and houses. At the north of the dig area a cemetery revealed the edge of the town, (Roman law required burials to be outside of towns), and numerous graves were recorded and sampled.

This was a settlement on an important route which would have had an economic function, supplying the needs of travellers, and making use of the River Stort for transport of goods too. Unlike many Roman towns it was not founded by the military first building a fort here, with civilian settlement following, but seems to have grown organically with evidence of occupation from the first to fifth centuries, and perhaps at its peak in the second century.

Although the excavation phase is now completed, much work remains to be done on the conservation of artefacts and analysis of material. Eventually this will go on display in Bishop's Stortford Museum. Reports will also be published on-line at the Historic Environment Record website

< <https://www.heritagegateway.org.uk/gateway/chr/default.aspx> > .

More Reading;

Hertfordshire Building Control report <https://www.hertfordshirebc.co.uk/roman-remains-and-treasures-in-east-herts/>

Tony Morton

An Eternal Sleep ? Bed Burials in Early Medieval Europe.

Speaker; Emma Brownlee

July 3, 2023

Burials are a rich source of information about our ancestors and Dr Brownlee has been studying the relatively unusual practice of burying the deceased on a bed. Found in certain areas across Europe, and in a few places in Britain, this practice casts light upon the process of christianisation from the 6th Century onwards, spreading from the east across Europe into southern Germany and then into England, where concentrations of these burials have been found in the Cambridgeshire and Suffolk area, and in the Wiltshire area.

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