



Museum Matters

Newsletter of Saffron Walden Museum Society Ltd

Autumn 2024 Issue 63

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Highlights and Happenings: From the Chairman

There is always a risk in predicting what may happen in the future when you can be right or wrong. And then there is being a bit of both. I noted in the Spring Newsletter the Parish Room talks would re-commence in April. Well that was right! Not so much 'warm balmy well-lit evenings'.

I would have been right if I had predicted three excellent and well attended talks in the second quarter of 2024. Tony Watson, our President, for our April talk gave a unique and well-illustrated presentation **Cyprus and the Holy Land** of his three year military service in the RAF in the 1950's in Cyprus including a short sojourn to the Holy Land. By chance I had an opportunity two weeks later to visit RAF Akrotiri as a guest of 84th Regiment, the Puma helicopter squadron, and all I can report is "My gosh, it's really changed" after nearly 70 years.

Looking nearer to our own backyard, in May, Alison Moller, the Garden Historian who lives in Clavering, gave an exciting and easy to understand look back to a billion years of Geology of Essex entitled **An examination of the Geology of Essex and how it impacts on Historic Land Use**. What left everyone enthralled was how minor changes in gardens so close together could be due to geological events millions of years ago.

Being Canadian by birth and having visited my large Canadian family in British Columbia in May I returned eager to hear the June talk by Julia Mackintosh, **A Pioneering Family in 19th century Canada**. It was fascinating, the story of her own family going back two centuries.

Julia's tenacity and persistence in researching the background from records both here and in Canada is an example to all amateur historians.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank the small team within the Operations Group who find such stimulating speakers and would ask you all if you attend talks elsewhere and you hear good ones please let Paul Salvidge know.

Curator's Column: Jenny Oxley

I'm pleased to announce that having submitted our policies and plans to the Arts Council at the beginning of this year, we have been informed that we've achieved full Accreditation, which is of great benefit, in showing the Arts Council's support and belief in us, but also helpful for advocating for the museum's future and for securing external grant funding.

Also good to note, is that our last quarterly report (Q1 Apr-Jun '24) showed that we have achieved the highest quarterly user figure since 2018 (the Ideagen portal we log the data on only goes back to 2018!) and increased income, which helps us build long-term sustainability.

In recent weeks we've been busy hosting / running events including the UDC Garden party, Fete de La Musique (500 people on site!), Garden Day and Thaxted Festival family concert. We helped out with the community archaeology dig at Great Chesterford at the end of June. We will be hosting a birthday party booking, with bouncy castle here on the 28th July and we will be at the Gardens of Easton Lodge doing WW2 themed outreach on 21st July.

If you are following us our social media, you'll see photos and videos of our most recent events in our feed. All our latest news is on our website www.saffronwaldenmuseum.org. We are always really grateful for all the positive feedback we receive online particularly on our social media channels, Tripadvisor and Google reviews.

At the museum we have recently opened our new exhibition "Soggy Sandwiches" beginning our "Super Summer," a series of craft activity sessions themed around the exhibition, and a district wide trail running through the school holidays in association with Discover Uttlesford. We are also being advertised along with other venues in the region, as part of the Cambridge Museums "Summer at the Museums"
<https://www.museums.cam.ac.uk/theme/summer>

Behind the scenes we have been equally busy, tidying up and re-organising more of the display and storage spaces. We've had compliance and maintenance improvements, including a much-needed revamp of the museum kitchen.

We've been partnering with the UCAN Volunteer bureau to bring in more volunteers to the museum including corporate social responsibility projects, which started recently with a team from a local company doing a one-off day helping to tidy up and do planting in the museum garden and grounds.

We are working hard as a team: staff, volunteers and stakeholders, to ensure the museum continuously improves and remains a vital resource and community hub for current and future generations to enjoy. Thank you for all your support, it is much appreciated.

Jenny Oxley

Natural Sciences: Sarah Kenyon

Displays

We hope you enjoyed our Natural Sciences exhibition 'Plants: The Struggle for Survival', which explored our relationship with plants and the secrets of their survival over time. It seemed to be over very quickly, and we have been putting away the pressed plants, fossils, taxidermy, and wonderful photographs taken by Barry Kaufmann Wright. My Object of the Month for May was a Red Kite. I remember travelling to the M4 area to see these rare birds and it is fantastic that their successful reintroduction to England enabled red kites to colonise this area. They are now a common sight in the sky above our district. Find out more in this newsletter.

Behind the Scenes

Congratulations to Museum Assistant Fiona who has finished recording all the birds' eggs stored in historic wooden cabinets at the Museum store. Work to list the eggs in an Excel spreadsheet started four years ago during the Covid 19 pandemic. The eggs were collected in the nineteenth century by H.E. Smith and other local people. This picture shows a drawer of Guillemot eggs in a cabinet containing a collection of British birds' eggs belonging to William Murray Tuke. He was the brother-in-law of George Stacey Gibson, a local banker and benefactor who wrote the first Flora about the plants of Essex. Guillemots, *Uria aalge*, nest on sea cliffs and steep ledges around the coast of the British Isles. Their eggs are pear-shaped which stops the eggs rolling off narrow rock ledges where the birds nest. Each egg has a unique pattern on its surface which the parents can recognise when they return to the ledge. The chicks dive off the cliff into the sea when they are only three weeks old. It is now illegal to disturb a nesting bird and their eggs are protected by the Wildlife and Countryside Act.



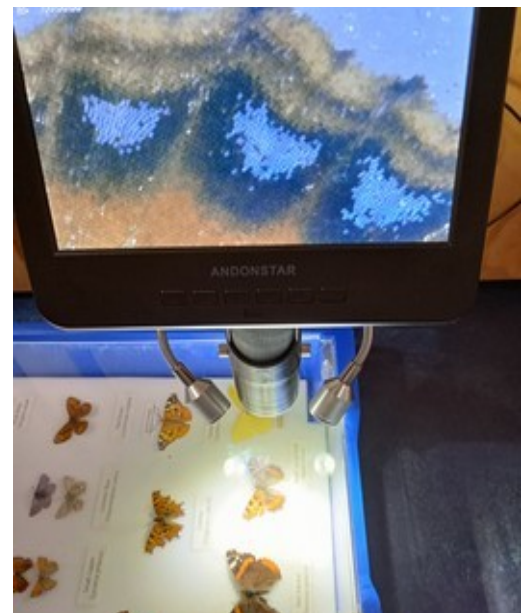
Verges

The verge volunteers and I have been out doing ecological surveys at the Special Roadside Verges in Uttlesford. The cold spring delayed plant flowering, however, the wet weather produced an explosion of growth. Unfortunately, a review of health and safety by Essex Wildlife Trust concluded that it was too dangerous for surveying of roadside verges to continue. In the meantime, Place Services at Essex County Council will continue to manage the verge cutting programme with the Essex Highways team. I would like to thank everyone who carried out surveys and helped to monitor the verges in Uttlesford. It has been an amazing effort and the decades of data from your work will continue to inform conservation decisions and actions at Essex Wildlife Trust and Essex County Council. Staff will consider how volunteers can contribute in future.

Natural Sciences: James Lumbard

New digital microscope

The digital microscope is freshly installed, providing wonderful magnification up to 720x – enough to see the individual scales on a butterfly's wing! We say goodbye to the old microscope after years of faithful service. As I write, the microscope still needs to be connected to the display screen, but it does have its own small screen built so is already doing the job well.



Garden successes



You may have noticed the flowerbeds around the Museum look a little fresher of late. Thanks to a small volunteer team from Lonza Biologics, the beds were cleared and dug over with fresh compost ready to be planted up during the Family Garden Fun Day on Saturday 6th July. (Thank you also to Uttlesford Community Action Network for helping arrange the volunteering day).

Thanks must go to the generous volunteers and SWMS members who dug up and divided houseplants, border plants, spare edibles and saplings to contribute to the plant sale for the Family Garden Fun Day. The day itself was, sadly, a bit of a wash-out, but some brave souls helped plant beans, sunflowers, apricot stones, cosmos, nigella and marigolds during the afternoon. We're looking forward to a flush of colour in a few weeks! SW Community Shed and the Uttlesford Climate Change team had a good day of crafts and sales inside the Museum.

Plants still available

Please do visit the Museum to pick up a herbaceous bargain with dozens upon dozens of plants still available. Donations in return for plants are very much welcomed through the till 10am-5pm Tue-Sat, and 2-5pm Sunday.



Work Experience

We welcomed a sixth form student from Saffron Walden County High School for work experience earlier in July. She made a valuable start cataloguing more than 60 fossils contained in one of the boxes of geological items loaned to Queen Mary College, London, and returned to Saffron Walden Museum in the 1990s

Collections Assistant: Simon Hilton-Smith

In my inaugural newsletter, I'm thrilled to introduce myself to those who haven't met me and to share a little about my background with those who have. My name is Simon Hilton-Smith, and I currently work as the collections assistant at the Museum. Through the years, I have gained diverse professional experiences, from working in museums such as the Royal Armouries and the Sainsbury Centre in Norwich to overseeing and launching restaurants, working as a freelance consultant, and collaborating with renowned chefs. My educational background includes an undergraduate and Master's degree from the University of Leeds in Art History and Museum Studies and another Master's degree from the University of East Anglia in the Arts of Africa, Oceania, and the Americas with the Sainsbury Research Unit. My primary research interests revolve around Africa and British colonial history and firearms and weaponry in a broader context.

I have always been deeply fascinated by museums, their operations, and their significance in today's rapidly changing world. Small museums with extensive collections are vital for preserving heritage. They actively explore how humans comprehend the world and its environments, offering valuable insights into our Western ways of thinking through different perspectives. Museums are the perfect space to contemplate humanity from the macro to the micro and ask some of society's big questions.

Anyhow, that's enough about me, let's get onto the museum.

It's been a busy couple of months for me. As soon as I started, I was tasked with arranging the summer exhibition. Beginning with the idea of summer, we ended up with "Soggy Sandwiches," a journey into British holidays of times past. This exhibition aims to be fun, light, and nostalgic. I hope the exhibition allows visitors to relive their own holidays and share their experiences with others - a semi-autobiographical experience enhanced by the objects in the gallery. To those who came to the opening event, I hope you had a great time. For those who didn't, I hope you visit us soon.

I've been busy working through inquiries about various items, from Neolithic flints to boomerangs and the Durham Light Infantry. I'm also continuing the work on the costume audit with Sarah and the Ethnographic collection audit with Tracey. Tracey and I have been discussing the collection, its fantastic array of hats, and how such a simple and universal idea can take many shapes and forms. Hopefully, one day, we can display these colourful wonders together, creating a backdrop any museum in the world would be proud to have.

We have added an exciting new item to our collection - a model of the Spider-Window house or "The Close" to give it its proper name. This model was previously displayed in the foyer of a bank in town and is a valuable addition to our small local history selection.

Now that the summer exhibition is underway, I want to understand the collection's strengths and weaknesses better. I also aim to understand how best to use and promote such an extraordinary museum. I am very much looking forward to the future and the challenges that it may bring.



Object of the Month

April 2024

Shadow Puppet from Indonesia

Chosen by; Dr Tracey Black

This month's Object of the Month, has been chosen by Dr Tracey Black, who has recently joined our team as a collections volunteer working on an audit of our world cultures collections.

April's Object of the Month is a *Wayang* (shadow) *Kulit* (skin/leather) puppet, from Java, Indonesia. It is made from dried water buffalo hide, which has been intricately painted.

Shadow puppetry using these types of flat, leather puppets originated in South India before the 10th century and probably spread to Java with Hinduism. It has a bone handle and would once have had moveable arms connected by a rod.

The dhalang (puppeteer) used these rods to manipulate the puppets behind a translucent screen (like a sheet), which was lit from behind.

Their popular night-time puppetry performances lasted for several hours and were accompanied by a percussion gamelan orchestra.

This puppet was collected in 1840 and represents Hanuman, the Hindu god, who is half human and half monkey. Hanuman possesses great strength, and he plays an important role in the *Ramayana* helping legendary Prince Rama rescue his wife Sita from the demon King Ravana.



May 2024
Red Kite
Chosen by Sarah Kenyon

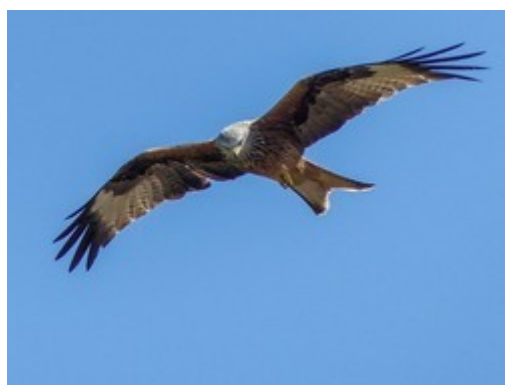


Adult red kite, © Saffron Walden Museum
SAFWM : NB 235A

May's Object of the Month is a Red Kite from the historic bird collection at Saffron Walden Museum.

Red kites became extinct in England and Scotland by the 1870s due to hunting and persecution. However, after receiving legal protection, and being reintroduced from the surviving population in Wales and birds from Scandinavia, they have made a remarkable comeback and are once again living in Essex.

If you look up to the sky and see a large bird with angled wings and a forked tail soaring above, you have spotted a red kite.



Red kite flying © Mike Prince, Wikimedia Commons

Essex Wildlife Trust members recorded their sightings during the lockdown in 2020. The birds were seen over Stansted, Bishop's Stortford, Great Dunmow and Much Hadham in the south, and up to Duxford, Littlebury, Saffron Walden and Ashdon in the north.



Map of red kite sightings in 2020,

T. Morton ©

The red kite, *Milvus milvus*, is a large bird of prey, with a wingspan of nearly 2 metres. They are 60-65 cm long and females are larger than males. The birds nest in broadleaf woodland. They usually lay two eggs a year. The chicks take months to leave the nest and become independent. Red kites are scavengers mainly living off carrion. They also hunt small mammals like rabbits, and eat earthworms. Their call is a 'mewing' sound. From medieval times the status of the bird alternated between valued scavenger of edible refuse in towns and bothersome opportunist snatching titbits from the poultry yard. In Tudor London the red kite population was protected by statute for its valuable refuse disposal services.

June 2024 Woad

The leaves of the woad plant (*Isatis tinctoria*) are a traditional source of blue dye across Europe, famously used by Celtic people in Britain at the time of the Roman Empire to paint or tattoo themselves blue. This may not be true, however. The main written evidence for this is from an account by Julius Caesar using the words “vitro inficiunt”. “Vitro” means “glass”, and the phrase translates to “infected with glass” or possibly “stain/dye with glaze”. Modern attempts to paint skin with woad find it flakes off too easily, and the caustic, corrosive nature of the substance would cause severe burns if used in tattoos. The blue colour could have come from substances containing copper, or even iron if prepared correctly.



July 2024 Taiaha

The Taiaha is a fighting quarterstaff used by the Māori warriors of Aotearoa. Taiaha is still used in Maori martial arts, also known as Mau Rakau.



Taiaha © SAFWM: 1913.89

This Taiaha is made from an indigenous Aotearoa (New Zealand) hardwood, showcasing the craftsmanship and artistry of Māori weaponry. Crafted as a quarterstaff, it features a long shaft with a blade-shaped striking end and intricately carved faces, known as *Upoko*, at the gripping end. These faces traditionally include shell inlays for eyes, giving them a striking and alert appearance. The carvings include an *Arero*, or tongue, protruding from each face, symbolising fierceness and readiness for battle, reminiscent of the traditional Māori display seen in the Haka, a ceremonial dance.

This particular Taiaha carries a rich history, evident in its physical manifestations. Notably, it bears signs of repair along the Tinana (shaft), with a section of the wood replaced and secured with pins and glue. The reasons behind this repair and its circumstances remain shrouded in mystery, adding an air of intrigue to the Taiaha's story.

Furthermore, the staff shows faint traces of writing on the Taiaha, obscured and unreadable under normal light. The potential for these words to offer insights into the Taiaha's history is compelling, prompting questions about who inscribed them and why.

The *Upoko*, shown to the right, is repeated on both flat sides of the fighting staff, but due to how they are carved, many faces are created and look in many directions.

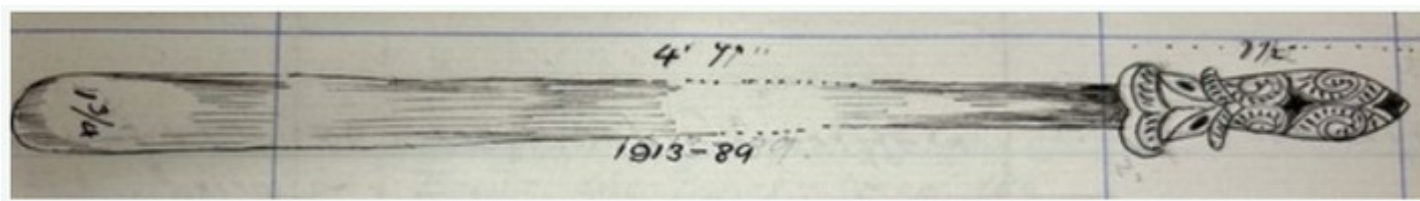
Additionally, the *Tauri*, a collar of feathers or hair that traditionally adorns the staff, hanging from the *Upoko* towards the bladed end, is missing. The lack of this significant feature raises further questions, suggesting possibilities such as damage, decay, or deliberate removal.



While we may never fully uncover the reasons behind the repair and the missing *Tauri*, it is a profound reminder of museum artefacts' enigmatic and complex histories. With the aid of technology, we may decode the all the inscriptions, yet the mysteries surrounding their authorship and purpose may remain unravelled. The enigmatic presence of these elements underscores the allure of museum work, as it invites us to delve into the varied lives an artefact has lived, from its origins in the hands of a Māori warrior to its arrival at the Saffron Walden Museum in 1913 and eventually to our contemplation of it today.

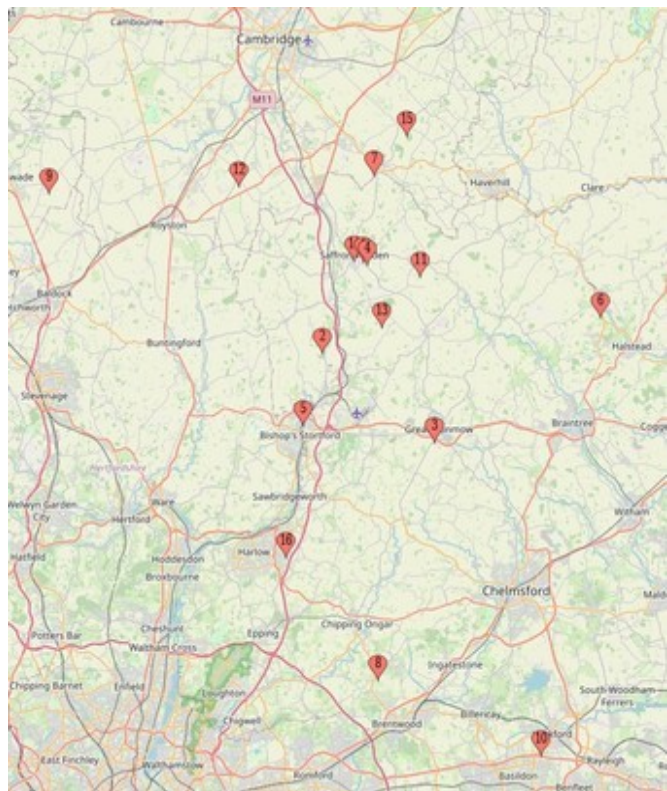
At its core, this *Taiaha* serves as a powerful bridge, connecting us to diverse histories and narratives. It's not just a relic, but a living testament that continues to resonate and inspire, enriching our understanding of the past and its relevance to our present and future. By engaging with it, we become a part of its story, and it becomes a part of ours.

Embark on a unique journey through the captivating World Cultures collection at the Saffron Walden Museum, where you can witness the *Taiaha* and other Māori artefacts, each with its own intriguing story. Visit the museum today to explore our work first-hand and be a part of its story.



The original sketch of the Taiaha from when it entered our collection in 1913.©

Learning and Outreach News : Charlotte Pratt



It's been a very busy few months for learning and outreach. School bookings are continuing to recover from the Covid slump with income up on the same quarter last year and just over 450 children benefiting from a trip to the Museum, or an outreach visit from April - June, this is up from 228 for the same period last year.

Loan boxes continue to be popular with 8 boxes going out this quarter. We have provided learning services to schools from across Uttlesford and beyond and I thought it would be interesting to put together a map to show the schools that are using our services. As you can see the breadth of hands-on history that the Museum provides benefits children from a wide area which is something to be proud of.

Ancient Egypt continues to be our most popular session, with teachers commenting that our small but perfectly formed Egypt gallery coupled with our excellent handling collection and personal booking service gives a unique experience that surpasses that of the big London Museums. As well as Egypt we have had visits covering of Ancient

Rome, Pre-History and Art & Design inspired our natural sciences collection. Its fantastic that we can facilitate such a broad range of topics and that is only made possible by the extraordinary breadth of our collections.

As well as our usual holiday activities for children during Easter and May half term in which children made Running Bunnies, Easter Egg Holders and Green Man puppets, we are also focusing more on delivering creative workshops for adults. This quarter we have delivered two sell out workshops, reduction lino printing and cyanotypes. The feedback from these events was very positive and we will be offering more workshops for adults later in the year.

We were also pleased to support the D-Day celebrations in Saffron Walden by lending our reminiscence boxes to the Town Council for their film event. Attendees were transported back in time handling objects from the 1930's-1950's. It was an excellent event attended by 50 local residents.

In May we worked with local artist Jessica Pearce on the "There be Giants" project. The art installation was set across six upstairs rooms of the iconic "Old Sun Inn" which was purchased by historic buildings specialist Douglas Kent in 2023.

At street level visitors could explore a curation of paintings, prints, sculpture and carvings by Aine Corr, Caroline Bugby, Mr Mortimer's Wife, Matt Bateman, Michelle Thompson and Jessica Pearce that were inspired by local legends and folklore, including the Gog Magog giants, Essex Serpent, Humpty Dumpty, Morris Dancing and mythology.

The Museum supported the project through the loan of a variety of object which were part of the 17th room, which was installed to appear as though its 17th century occupant had just stepped out for a moment. We also produced an interactive picture of the room, so visitors could learn more about our objects on display and a 17th Century walking trail map to help visitors explore Saffron Walden through from a new perspective. The exhibition was attended by 85 children and approximately 900 adults.

Lastly, we celebrated volunteers week in June with our annual volunteers Tea Party. Its so important that we take the time to celebrate our volunteers as without them we simply could not open our doors or deliver any of the activities and events that I have mentioned in this article. So once again a huge 'thank you' to our amazing volunteer team, and special thanks to June Baker who did a lot of the organising for the event!

As part of the event some volunteers choose their favourite objects from the Museum and to close my article for this quarter I thought it would be interesting to share some of those with you.

Angie Jones selected the "Witches Marks on the Harvey Fireplace" in the Local History Gallery saying "I find them fascinating; it was their protection against evil and it seems this is still surviving in some countries in different forms".

June Baker choose the "Portrait of an Unknown Lady" in the Ceramics Gallery saying "I have collected pomanders for over 50 years. In the Portrait the lady appears wealthy and is wearing a pomander."

Natalie Stirling highlighted "The Bird with the Worm in its mouth" part of the natural history diorama. Natalie says "It brings back memories of bringing my son to the Museum (from the age of one!) and him skidding to a halt in the upstairs gallery to see if the worm was still there!"

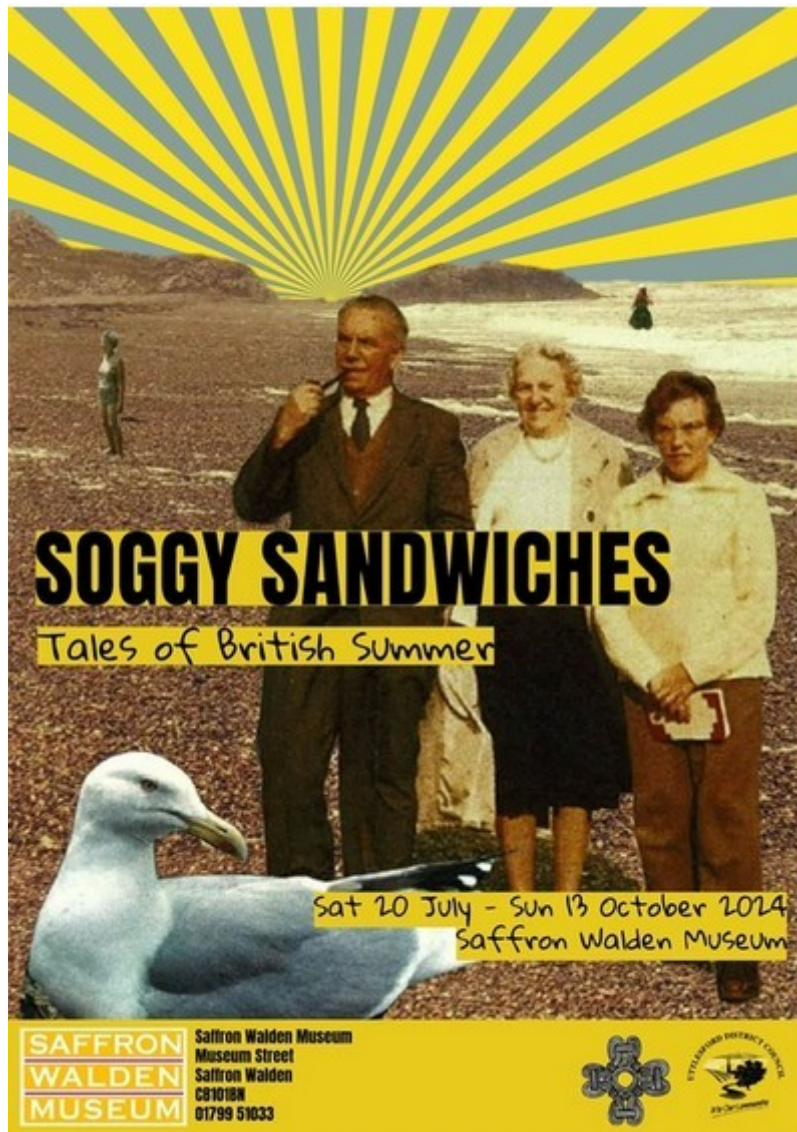
Volunteer News, Human History : Simon Hilton-Smith

The volunteers working in Human History have been working as hard as ever. Sarah and Tracey are vital to the auditing work that the museum needs to carry out. We have found a few items that have raised some eyebrows, including a Hitler Youth belt based on the British Sam Browne. Although not unusual, the history of how it came to be in the collection might be intriguing.

Tracey, a Doctor of visual culture, has spent many minutes discussing the aesthetic possibilities of some of our ethnographic collections. At the moment, Tracy is finding a lot of headwear from all over the non-Western world. This stunning collection offers insight into how such a simple and seemingly universal idea can be transformed through different cultural understandings. She hopes, as do I that one day we can display all these fantastic hats with those from our own culture in a stunning and Instagramable display of colour and form. Where there is a will, there is a way!

There is always more to do with auditing collections, and it is easy to chase a single thread deep into a rabbit hole, but then again, that's why many love the work—you never know what you may find and where it might lead.

Exhibitions and Upcoming Events:



Soggy Sandwiches: Tales of British Summer. 20th July 2024 to 13th October 2024

As the Sun sits high in the sky come and explore the history of the British Summer Holiday from its beginnings to its waterlogged sun-soaked seaside best. How has how we holiday changed? From suits to swimsuits, trains to planes, soggy sandwiches to instant BBQs. The history of the holiday with plenty of fun for everyone (ages 1-100).

Forthcoming event are always listed on the Saffron Walden Museum website at this page address;
<https://www.saffronwaldenmuseum.org/events/>

Museum Shop Highlights:

The shop highlights for this newsletter have been selected and written about by one of our work experience students, Daisy, on work experience from Saffron Walden County High School. Daisy also supported with preparation of materials for summer holidays activities and helped our young visitors make a flappy seagull in the first of our summer holiday craft sessions.

Summer at the museum shop:

The theme of summer created by the newest special exhibition 'Soggy Sandwiches: Tales of British summer' can also be found throughout the shop.

Animal greeting cards:

These watercolour portraits were created by Daniel Mackie who was heavily influenced by Ukiyo-e Japanese printmakers of the 1670's to 1870's. The vibrant colours and floral design tie in closely with the theme of the exhibition evoking feelings of summer.

Colourful tumble stones:

These polished stones provide bright colour to the shop, their cheerful vividness is a reminder of the colours shown by the arrival of summer.

Floral soaps:

These soaps made by the English soap company have scents such as rose and peony, pink grapefruit and English lavender which serve as a reminder of the floral summer scents that can now be found around the English countryside



By Daisy C

Museum Society News

Membership

Members' subscriptions

Thank you to all who paid their subscriptions promptly. There are a few who have yet to pay, and reminders have been issued. Please deal with this promptly to save further admin.

If you would like to pay on-line, please contact Christine by phone 01799 527546 or by email s.christinesharpe@hotmail.co.uk for the Society bank details.

Cheques made out to Saffron Walden Museum Society Ltd are not a problem, we can even cope with cash. These should preferably be sent to the Museum marked Society membership. Despite many problems caused by closures we can still put money into our bank account.

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 or from the Treasurer.

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, with a museum quiz trail
- Annual General Meeting – Attend and vote; have your say in how the Museum Society is run.

From Our President

Our president, Tony Watson, was invited to the Royal Garden party at Buckingham Palace on the 8th May 2024. Hosted by King Charles III and Queen Camilla, who were supported by the Princess Royal and the Duke & Duchess of Edinburgh, there were 8000 guests in attendance. The weather was hot and dry. The Gardens are beautiful.

Tony Watson



© Tony Watson

Reports on Talks

Cyprus and the Holy Land

Speaker: Tony Watson

8 April 2024

Tony's talk focussed upon the two years which he spent on his National Service in the RAF, based in Nicosia. The recent re-discovery of his box of colour slide photographs from those two years in the 1950's formed the basis of the talk.

Beginning with a brief summary of the history of the island, it is territory which has always been fought over, from the Mycenaeans, Romans, Ottomans, Byzantines, Republic of Venice, Ottomans again, a British protectorate, Greek claims, and from 1925 a Crown Colony.

Upon leaving Friend's School in December 1952 with 4 GCEs, none of them Latin which was required to study as a legal Clerk, his preferred career, National Service called, but to avoid actual call-up and some random posting he volunteered for the RAF, which would be 3 years Service and 2 further years in the Reserves. After initial training at RAF Cardington in January 1954 he moved on to RAF Thorney Island, which was run by the Fleet Air Arm. But then in January 1955 he was posted to the Middle East Air Force, which had its HQ in Egypt, but then a few days later was moved on to Cyprus at RAF Nicosia, an air base shared as the National Airport. He was a Clerk Personnel, one of a team of 6. As well as looking after records he was recruited by a senior officer to help build him a dinghy, and so found himself planing wood too. But the main role was to maintain personnel records. In November 1955 he was promoted to Corporal – 2 stripes. The working hours in the hot climate were 7.00 a.m. to Noon, but after that one person had to be on duty to receive any signals coming in on teleprinter or radio; a long shift from Noon to 7.00 a.m. the next day, and at weekends it included the whole next day too.

However it meant that on rotation the afternoons were free for leisure, playing tennis in summer and hockey in winter. In the first year it was also possible to leave the camp and do some touring, visiting the RAF sailing club in Kyrenia was a favourite, and car hire was available. Tony showed many photos taken from those trips around the island. During 1955 the Greek troubles began, with the organisation EOKA pressing for Greek Independence.

At Christmas 1955 he managed to get a flight home originally planned as a charter, but when that collapsed British European Airways took over. He returned to Cyprus, where changes were happening. The HQ was moved from Egypt to Cyprus, EOKA became more active, and the troops were put on Active Service enforcing a 9.00 pm curfew, patrolling with the issued Sten Guns. Leisure outside the camp was terminated, but visits were allowed, travelling first to Lebanon which was a booming financial centre, and in September 1956 to Israel, and Tony showed photos of his trips there visiting the famous sights. Interestingly his passport was stamped as entering the 'Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan'.

The year 1956 saw the 'Suez Crisis' when the ruler, Nasser, wanted to build the Aswan Dam but wanted the USA to pay for it, and he nationalised the Suez Canal, which had been built by, and belonged to, Britain and France. The occupation of the canal began in October, and Israel then invaded on the 29th, giving an excuse for UK paratroopers to airdrop on November 5th. Akrotiri was very busy as all of the aircraft were refuelled there. Geopolitics took over, and at the UN the USA and Russia insisted that the UK and France should leave Egypt. The war was all over in 6 weeks. Tony's Service ended in December 1956 and he was flown to Malta first, then to England, with a bit of excitement at Southend Airport where the plane had problems landing on the short runway. His transfer to Reserves followed in January '57, and he was awarded the Cyprus Medal in August 1957.

Tony Morton

Essex Traces

An examination of the Geology of Essex and how it impacts on Historic Land Use

Speaker: Alison Moller

13 May 2024

Is our human land use driven mainly by local geology? This was the question that Alison Moller set out to examine. Beginning with a summary of local geology, the oldest surface rocks found in Essex are Cretaceous, chalk from about 80 million years ago (mya) and found in the north-west of the county and at Thurrock in the south east. Formed at a time when the area was further south at 30 degrees North but beneath a warm tropical

sea. The continent of Pangaea was breaking apart at this time, and the Atlantic Ocean was opening up, and the north-west of Britain slowly rose and erosion removed about 2 kilometres thickness of older rocks making sediments which were re-deposited into the area known now as the London Basin, and forming London Clay. There were subsequently also times when deserts prevailed and sandstones were formed.

From about 2mya the global climate changed to a glacial regime and as water froze the sea levels dropped so Essex emerged from the seas. Glaciers both weather rock and erode them, picking up everything from clay to boulders, and the example of the Newport Leper Stone is well-known (formed 55mya in desert conditions – the ‘Reading beds’).

Rivers have changed their courses over time, and in early glacial times the Proto-Thames flowing from Snowdonia and Proto-Medway flowing northwards from the Wealden highlands ran across the middle of the county from west to east (at Clacton) and further on to what was once dry land due to low sea levels (Doggerland), eventually creating the Dogger Lake, freshwater, also fed by rivers from Europe. From around 450,000 years ago the Anglian Glaciation eventually diverted the Thames southwards into its present course, but its original valley can still be seen at Ware; the A10 viaduct crosses it there. Glaciers produced Boulder Clay and deposited that across north Essex and brought flints to the surface. An almost permanent easterly wind deposited loess, and formed the rock we call Brickearth, a fertile modern soil type.

The Dogger Lake drained across a ridge of chalk which stretched from modern Kent into France, and probably fell from 30 metre high cliffs. These were eroded by the waterfall and eventually a gap opened up which was the beginning of the English Channel about 9000 years ago.

Traces of early humans have been found from before the Anglian Glaciation, 600,000 years ago at Westcliffe for example. Our species Homo Sapiens re-colonised Britain as the glaciation came to an end, but in Mesolithic times the east coast would still have been much further east than today’s coast, somewhere in the middle of the north sea basin.

So those are the geological backgrounds on which humans have made their civilisations, but there are also other factors to be considered too. Geology can produce clay soils that are good for farming, and early livestock farming produced milk which could be made into cheeses if one had salt. The sea provided that resource, and the ‘red hills’ on the Essex coast are remains of industrial salt production from pre-Roman times.

Protection of the grazing livestock resulted in a series of hill forts along the west Essex border with Hertfordshire where the territories of the Trinovantes and Catuvellauni adjoined.

Essex had very few towns before Roman occupation, but their towns were placed at road junctions rather than because of underlying geology.

The new technology of ploughing also had an influence, with heavy clay soil needing the invention of the mould board plough before it could be used for crop growing. Other influences were political or even fashion; in architecture for example leading to brick-making industry. Geology is not the whole story in human land use.

Tony Morton

William and Ann York; A Story of Emigration

Speaker; Julia MacIntosh

2 June 2024

The talk was based upon the genealogical research in to the history of Julia’s family; the York family. Using many on-line sources and parish records the earliest person that can be traced is Anthony York de Warbleton from a small village in Sussex close to the village of Dallington where both sets of parish records show the family living in this small area for centuries. Julia became interested in William York, who was recorded as born in 1775, but who then disappears from the records. What happened to him?

On-line records from the IGI, the International Genealogical Index (a large archive of historical data originally submitted by members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints), and the Canadian census eventually revealed the he had moved to Ottawa in March 1827. The Osgoode Historical Society have published on-line and book, ‘William and Ann York, the English Yorks, and they have a whole shelf of records. The claim is made that they were the first white settlers in the area.

Why would they have chosen to emigrate? The 1820s in Sussex were a time of hardship and poverty, and unrest. A better life was offered by emigration schemes being circulated in pamphlets. In 1781 the United Kingdom had bought land from the First Nations, the Crawford Purchase, and in order to get it occupied loyalists to the British Crown could buy 100 acres. The publicity stressed how good the land was for growing crops and raising animals. There may also have been a link through the Methodists Church, Ann's maiden name was Embury, and the founder of Methodism in New York shared that name, and may have been a cousin.

The journey to get there was arduous, a voyage of 6 to 8 weeks by boat, where you had to take all your own food with you. William and Ann had 8 children with them. The first stop was Quebec, a well established city, then on along the St. Lawrence seaway to Montreal, another 180 miles. It was then a further 100 miles to a small town called Cornwall, where they stayed for three years. In 1827 William bought his 100 acres, 50 miles away in a place called Osgoode, and to get there involved walking on poorly marked tracks; there were no roads, travelling in March over hard frozen ground by Ox Sled.

General accounts of settlers explain that the first task was to set up a tent, then begin to fell trees, clearing 40 to 100 trees per acre with a hand axe, and eventually building a log cabin. Cleared land could be ploughed between the stumps, sowing wheat, a hard life. Snow left the ground around April 2nd, then May was very hot and then mosquitoes for 2 months. A very isolated life. The first roads were built to connect neighbours, a place called York's Corner still exists. All supplies had to come the 50 miles from the St. Lawrence River. The nearest mill for the harvested wheat was 35 miles away by canoe, and the round trip took a week. Flour could then be sold to get money for other needed things. There were collective wool shearings with neighbours helping, and then it too could be sent to the St. Lawrence for weaving into cloth, which could be sold, or used at home for making clothing.

This link will tell you about the Founding Of Osgoode Township;
<https://www.heritagetrust.on.ca/plaques/founding-of-osgoode-township>

Here is a photo of the Town Plaque;

http://lh3.googleusercontent.com/HKsGNTY5sMU6pKrTFGT1sp6RhQScGpBbwYdGH7_5mYWEyhLN3DIIxBDqzUIHrr3lkltnxOleRuPdHD7h_mKwmOEdHLA

And this link is to the Osgoode Museum;

<https://osgoodemuseum.ca/english/about-us/history.html>

Tony Morton

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