Museum Matters

Newsletter of Saffron Walden Museum Society Ltd

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Highlights and Happenings: From the Chairman

You might be aware that four Society Directors and a four of Uttlesford District Councillors meet quarterly for the Museum Management Working Group a formal reported meeting the agenda, minutes and reports being available for public scrutiny on the Uttlesford District Council website. Included on the Agenda is the Museum Manager Report.

These reports have always been very comprehensive and informative. This quarter's report was exceptional in the success it was able to highlight of the activities of Jenny and the Museum Team. Jenny and the Team were unanimously congratulated on the excellent work being undertaken at the Museum in the Quarter. So well done all!

This issue of **Museum Matters** highlights the team's growth with new people, the success of our exhibitions, our attendance at the Big Green Festival, the continued development of our relationship with Cardboard Clues and three highly successful Schoolroom talks.

Our Object of the month is a fascinating story Chief Waabaanakwad, a 19th century leader of part the Chippewa tribe and his Bandolier Bag. The style was incidentally copied by Europeans moving west and was recognised as a "possibles bag" . These are still used to this day by US hunters using 19th century firearms.

The Schoolroom development project has started and architects have already been on site as part of the project tendering process. The target is completion by next summer, (he says optimistically).

Museum Manager's Column: Jenny Oxley

Well it's been a warm one! Record breaking temperatures reduced our admission numbers, but thankfully we managed to offset that with group bookings, school sessions and outreach work, in terms of user numbers and income. We continued our growth trend, with the Q1 (April-June 2026) user figures up for the 3rd financial year in a row to 4,814 users.

We've had a lot of staff changes this quarter. Following Jessica Holbrook retiring, Lloyd Martin joined the team as Museum Support Officer. With James Lumbard-Smith seconded to the Uttlesford District Council Climate Change team, from September 2025, until March 2027. Charlotte Pratt, our Learning & Outreach Officer has now been seconded to the Natural Sciences Officer role since 1st April 2026. Anna Spencer joined the team on the 2nd June as backfill for Charlotte, as Learning & Outreach Officer. Following Michael Davidson leaving the team in early April, Charlotte Cooper will be joining the museum team on the 28th July as Community Engagement Officer. Our team information can be found here: https://www.saffronwaldenmuseum.org/contact-us/our-team/ Find out in their reports below what they've all been working on.

We had a lovely Easter holiday with the children's activities themed to our last canine themed exhibition, Pooch. We contributed this quarter to Saffron Walden's bid to be Town of Culture led by Saffron Walden Town Council. Though it sadly didn't go through to the next stage, it was a useful process which should feed into local community project planning work and the associated publicity helped to promote the town and museum. In May, the Big Green Day held at the Museum was a huge success, part of the UDC Big Green Festival led by the UDC Climate Change team.
In May, we opened the new exhibition, Life: 100 years of David Attenborough, and therefore all our summer holiday craft activities are themed around the exhibition, called Wild Child Summer, with a range of additional events provided, including a day of early Saxon re-enacting by the Swords of Penda, and a Saturday session with Paul Hunt, exhibiting his WW2 themed private collection.

Our successful partnership with Cardboard Clues, to put on an ongoing immersive murder mystery app game in the museum, "Murder in the Museum" is continuing to attract new users to the museum, increasing dwell time and encouraging retail spend. It's free for us to run and the museum gets a cut of the income from the games running at the museum. We've extended the Cardboard Clues partnership and in July the existing cardboard clues games changeover over to a new set called Movie Night Murder, which should encourage the teams to return. To date over 530 teams have played cardboard clues at the museum, bringing in around £2,000. It shows the power of having more of our Facebook social media posts on paid sponsorship to boost the algorithm, to enable us to be seen by a broader audience. It's hard to log in to Facebook without seeing an advert for our Cardboard Clues game if you are based locally.

We've been busy supporting Berden with their National Lottery Heritage Funded project, celebrating their parish history and that of the surrounding villages such as Clavering and Munuden, helping to preserve it for future generations to enjoy. Find out from Anna in the Learning & Outreach section more about our work with Clavering Primary as part of this project.

Behind the scenes, we've been busy with an internal audit, creating an updated business continuity plan for the museum, and installing new interior and exterior signage around the site with Saffron Signs. Later this year, we expect council capital development work to the museum building to begin, making adaptations to the fire exit, fire alarm and emergency lighting, as well as roof and drainage improvements, with the Museum Society looking at the possibility of undertaking additional development works to the schoolroom and workshop, subject to planning.

On the 4th June, we celebrated our volunteers at the annual tea party, where the team showed the volunteers, resources from our new calm sessions for neurodiverse people. Jane Hook, one of our valued volunteers has established a gardening group on Fridays at the museum. I'm sure you will join me in thanking Jane and her volunteers on their success in making the grounds close to the museum building far more attractive. The Museum Society have kindly funded some of the materials needed to get the group off the ground! Gardening is such a great wellbeing activity! If you would like to join this group, please email the museum museum@uttlesford.gov.uk titling your email Gardening group and we will pass on your interest to Jane.

If you would like more general information about the museum and our exhibitions and events programme, consider signing up for our monthly E-News

Sadly, on the 26th June the museum's former Premises & Security Officer, Stefan Shambrook passed away at Addenbrookes Hospital. We are looking at how to celebrate his life and the role he played in the museum. We will share details in due course.

Natural history & Geology collections :Charlotte Pratt

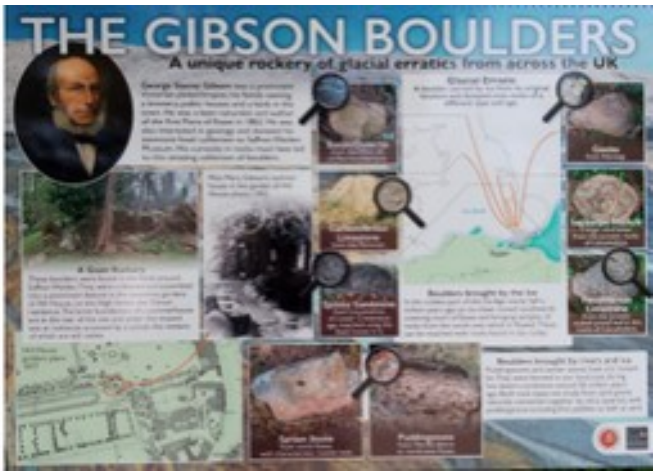
New (financial) year, new me!

Most of you are probably familiar with me as the Museums Learning and Outreach Officer, and as some of you may be aware, I had been in that post for 8 years. When the opportunity arose to sidestep to cover the Natural Sciences Officer role as a secondment, it seemed like an opportunity not to be missed. I am really looking forward to building on my existing skills and developing some new ones to tackle new and exciting projects!

In my first article as the Museum's Natural Sciences officer, I thought it would be good to feature a few of the stories that have come to light in my first couple of months on the job, and I hope to be able to share some project developments in the next instalment.

Inauguration of the information board at the Gibson Boulders

My first duty as Natural Sciences Officer was to attend the unveiling of the new information boards for the Gibson Boulders. The site is geologically important and provides evidence of the movement of an ice sheet across Britain 450,000 years ago. The site, on the corner of Gibson Gardens and Margaret Way, consists of a mound containing numerous large boulders which were placed here by the naturalist George Stacey Gibson in the 19th century, and is a notified Local Geological Site.



The new sign at Gibson Gardens

The boulders, some of which are over 1.2 metres in size, were gathered by Gibson from local fields where they were dumped as the ice sheet melted. There are over 30 boulders of at least nine different rock types. The mound links geology and social history and can tell a story not only about the Ice Age but also about the history of the town and one of its most famous residents.

The Museum, of course boasts its own glacial erratic boulder, weighing about 2 tons, which can be seen in the museum grounds. It was carried to Saffron Walden from the Peterborough area by the Anglian ice sheet. It was found when digging the foundations of the former Acrow (Engineers) Ltd factory on Ashdon Road. The boulder is also a septarian nodule. Septarian nodules are made of cementstone and calcite and they formed in the clay bed of the seas that flooded Britain periodically during the Jurassic period 145 to 200 million years ago.

Beware the invisible ray!
Ironizing radiation in the collection.

In early July I attended a two-day training course to become the Museum's second RPS (Radiation Protection Supervisor). The role of the supervisor is to ensure that staff and visitors to the Museum and its stores can work safely with radioactive objects in the collection.

The Museum holds seven objects that give off ironizing ration, six of which are geological samples and the seventh is a compass with a painted Radium dial, which is a luminous material. Before the 1970s it was regularly used in the production of compass and watch dials. The radiation emitting geological samples are of pitchblende, torbernite, and autunite.

Pitchblende, also known by the name uraninite, is comprised mainly of oxides of the element uranium and is its primary. Black in colour, like 'pitch', with the term 'blende' thought to come from the German miners who believed it contained many different metals all blended together. Pitchblende was the source of discovery for several

elements. In 1789, German chemist Martin Heinrich Klaproth successfully identified uranium from pitchblende samples taken from the Bohemian silver mines. He named the new substance "uranium" to honour the planet Uranus, which had been discovered just a few years prior. In 1898, Marie and Pierre Curie discovered the element radium while working with pitchblende. In 1895, William Ramsay was the first to isolate helium from pitchblende.

Torbernite is a uranium-bearing copper-phosphate mineral which is used, on a very limited scale, as an ore of uranium. Usually associated with autunite, it occurs as green crystals or mica-like masses that are weathering products of uraninite. Torbernite is abundant in Cornwall where this, along with the other active samples, were collected.

Autunite is an uncommon secondary mineral that results from uranium-bearing minerals in oxidizing conditions and in hydrothermal veins and granite pegmatites, and other geological settings. It is a widespread mineral that can be found as excellent specimens in France, Portugal, Italy, Germany, England, the United States, Brazil, and Australia, among several other localities. Autunite is highly radioactive and will fluoresce a yellow-green under ultraviolet light, which can be seen in action in our geology display!

Collections Officer, Human History: Simon Hilton-Smith

The View from Here

From my desk near the museum toilets – an unexpectedly good listening post – I often overhear visitors chatting about the museum, its collections, and Saffron Walden itself. It's always fascinating to hear their initial impressions, especially when they're surprised by the sheer size and variety of our collections and the depth of history they hold. As summer approaches and the museum gets busier, the number of opinions grows, but the positivity remains constant. I wholeheartedly agree: there's something truly special about both the collections and the very fabric of this museum.

The Australian case in the World Cultures gallery is finally coming together, with just a few things left to mount and a few labels left to write; the final product should soon be ready. It has been a learning curve, acquiring new skills and conducting fresh research into one of the main donors, John Helder Wedge. Wedge's collection forms the main backbone of the case, and the story of his early years in Tasmania and mainland Australia is a fascinating one, but it is the things themselves, the clubs, spears and boomerangs, that bring researchers from the other side of the world to this tiny town in Northwest Essex. The importance of this collection is hard to overstate, but it has been easy to miss. Hopefully the new slightly improved display will give more prominence to one of our most researched and visited international collections.

Recently, I've been working with a diverse group of work experience students, ranging from Year Ten students to university undergraduates. This has been a valuable reminder of the extensive effort involved in museum work. Behind every exhibition are tasks like writing labels, refining designs, managing expenses, and even making deliveries to distant locations like Bungay. Of course, there's also the sheer joy of research – nothing quite says glamour like a well-organised spreadsheet. With the help of these wonderful and endlessly engaging young people, we've been exploring the costume gallery to see how it could better connect with younger audiences, examining Greek pottery, and researching my upcoming exhibition, Languages of Faith.

Languages of Faith will explore the diverse religious art within the collection and investigate how we express and convey our beliefs through objects. Religion is inherently complex and elusive, prompting questions about its nature and boundaries. Drawing on Howerth's perspective, 'religion is the effective desire to be in the right relations to the power manifesting itself in the universe,' we can observe a universal human yearning to comprehend the universe and our existence. This universal drive also manifests in a desire to share our beliefs and connect with the other world inhabited by supernatural forces interacting with our own.

This exhibition will delve into various media, from Bibles and Hebrew scrolls to Quranic boards, canoes, icons, and hats, to examine how we transmit our faith and strive to maintain harmonious relationships with other realms of existence. Focusing on four key concepts – The Written Word, Words of Power, The Unwritten Word, and the Heard Word – we will explore the differences and shared experiences in how humans have sought to understand the world, its imperfections and follies, to reflect our fears and hopes, and to influence it through words and art.

With objects from all over the world and from across our collections, I hope that everyone will find something of interest and will come out of the exhibition looking at the world around them in a slightly different way.

[1] Howerth, I. W., 'What is Religion', International Journal of Ethics, 13, 2 (January 1903). pp. 185-206 (p.205).

Archaeology Collections : Jenny Oxley

The archaeological work continues to stream in as ever, with treasure case finds and archaeological depositions from the archaeology units. So we're busy processing and cataloguing archaeological finds and paperwork at our Shire Hill store, as we remain the district repository for archaeological survey work: finds and reports which result from new building and development work undertaken in Saffron Walden and the surrounding area. This quarter, we've begun working with Archaeology South-East (ASE is part of UCL) to transfer their archaeological finds and associated paperwork to the museum, as well as an additional archive regarding material from Sewards End.

The treasure finds this month, kindly funded by the Museum Society, are a post-medieval finger ring from Langley Parish, four Roman coins from Barnston parish, an early medieval gold brooch from Sewards End, six medieval coins from Great Easton and a Roman octagonal silver ring from Barnston parish.

The big progress this quarter on collections work, was sending our Modes (collections database) records to the Collections Trust, for their Museum data survey (MDS), which will be an online collections database (text-based), representing the collections of museums across the country and beyond, designed primarily for researchers. We transferred over 60,000 records, which was quite a feat given the data was in around 40 sub databases on Modes. The next stage is to clean the data and map the database fields to ensure our data can be shared online publicly to best effect. We'll let everyone know when it goes live.

I will be taking some of our archaeological resource boxes to Cressing Temple, Braintree for the Essex Festival of Archaeology and History on Thursday 23rd July, as outreach. These events are useful for promoting our resources and the museum to the public, as well as researchers and teachers.

Object of the Month

May 2026
Bandolier Bag of Waabaanakwad



This month's object is this bag, said to have belonged to the Chief Waabaanakwad (1830-1898), or Wah Bah naquad, of the Anishinaabe of the White Earth Reservation in Minnesota. The Bag came to the museum in 1880 from Lord Charles Hervey (1814-1880), one of the sons of the 1st Marquess of Bristol, who died as the rector of Great Chesterfield in 1880. Lord Hervey donated many objects to the museum from around the world, yet how he came to own such wonders is, for now, a mystery.



The bag was probably made for rifle or musket ammunition and is beautifully decorated with beads of white, yellow, red and blue. There is an embroidered panel set on red material near the opening, and the strap is also highly decorated. The bag is finished with blue tassels. There are repeated patterns of twin arrowheads and flowers.

Chief Waabaanakwad (grey/pale/white cloud) was an Anishinaabe, also called the Ojibwa or Chippewa, part of the Anishinaabeg linguistic group who came from the United States of America and the Canadian border area. Born at Gull Lake in Minnesota, he became chief after his father's, Waubojeeg, death.



The Gull Lake band, of which Waabaanakwad was chief, was moved to the Leech Lake area after the Dakota War of 1862, also known as the Little Crows War. Even though the band seems not to have been involved in the war, where the main protagonists were the Dakota Sioux, who, after being starved and facing displacement, attacked the white colonialist settlements along the Minnesota River.

After the defeat of the Dakota Sioux by the United States Army, many of the Dakota and the Ojibwa were forcibly moved from their lands to control the indigenous population and their movements.



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At the Leech Lake reservation, Waabaanakwad was considered the pre-eminent chief of not only his band but of the displaced Mississippi Chippewa Bands. It was in this role that he signed the Treaty of Washington in 1867, where it was agreed that the various peoples would recognise the supremacy of the United States Government, recovering after the end of a brutal civil war, and also grant land rights for the railways and, in some cases, telegraph lines that would cross their land. There was also the agreement that no federal legislation could interfere with their tribal organisation.



In 1868, Waabaanakwad led his people to the White Earth Indian Reservation, where he remained until his death some 30 years later. At some point in the 1870s, he converted to Christianity and took the name D. G. Wright, though it is said he rarely used it. In the 1890s, just before his death, he further converted to Roman Catholicism.

Waabanakwad's legacy does not end with his death, however, and the first United States Navy vessel named after an indigenous North American was named

after him. In 1945, the USS Wabanquot (another alternative spelling), a Hisada-class tug, was launched and was in service till 1976.

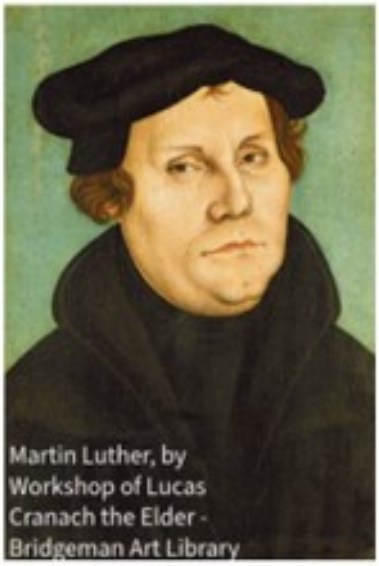
Visit the museum to see this amazing bag and more Ojibwa and First Nation objects, and learn more about the fascinating history of North America.

June 2026
Polyglot Bible printed by Christophe Plantain, Antwerp, 1571 CE.



This large leather-bound Bible was donated to the museum in 1895 CE by G.S. Gibson with another printed book of scripture from 1483. It is a fine example of a polyglot Bible printed by Christophe Plantin (1520–1589 CE) and edited by Benedictus Arias Montanus. Plantin produced these Bibles in Antwerp, then under Habsburg control and part of the Spanish Empire, between 1569 and 1572 CE. This was during the early years of the Eighty Years' War (1568–1648 CE), which saw conflict between those who identified as Dutch, often in disparate rebel groups rather than a unified national force, and the Spanish government. The war concluded with the Peace of Westphalia in 1648, which recognised an independent Dutch state. The conflict had many causes, including excessive taxation, the rights and privileges of the Dutch nobility and the Reformation.

The Reformation


Martin Luther, by Workshop of Lucas Cranach the Elder - Bridgeman Art Library

The Reformation, a religious revolution that spread across Western Europe in the second half of the 16th century, caused schisms within the Christian Church, justified centuries of conflict and laid the foundation for Protestantism.

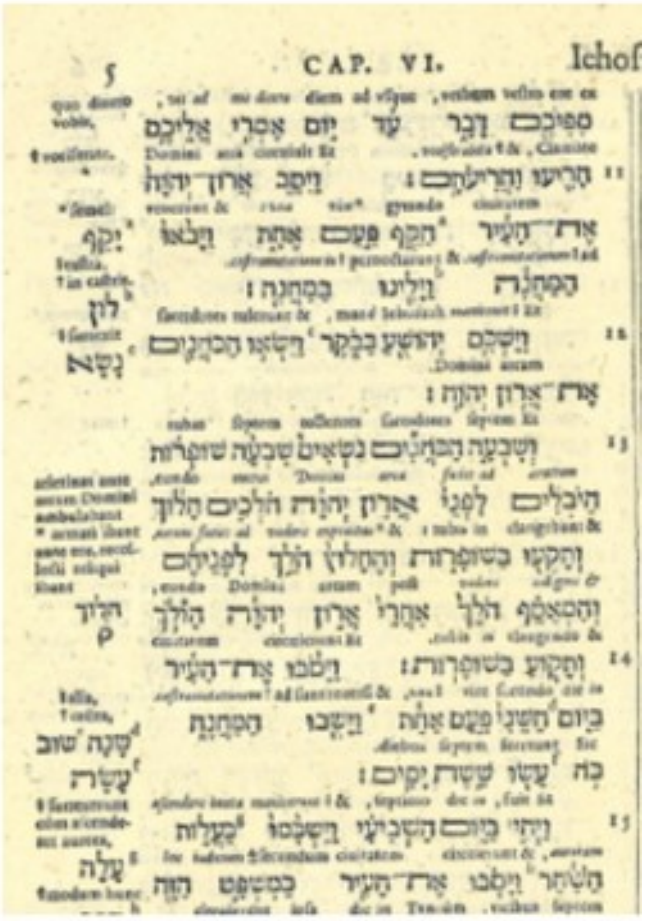
Led by John Calvin and Martin Luther, the Reformation recognised the Bible as the supreme path to God. It sought access to the written word in the vernacular of the people, such as French, Dutch, German or English. It also reinterpreted earlier Church writings, challenging superstitions like transubstantiation and the continuation of indulgences and miracles. The reformers argued that the age of miracles ended with the completion of the Bible and that the 'Word' took precedence over the 'Sign'.

On 31 October 1517 CE, Martin Luther posted his Ninety-five Theses on the door of Castle Church in Wittenberg, Germany, marking the commencement of the Reformation. He distinguished himself from previous reformers by addressing the theological root of the church's corruption, namely the perversion of its doctrine of redemption and grace. As a pastor and professor at the University of Wittenberg, Luther deplored the entanglement of God's gift of grace within a complex system of indulgences and good works. In his theses, he criticised the indulgence system, asserting that the pope lacked authority over purgatory and that the doctrine of the merits of the saints was not founded in the gospel. This assertion was the key to Luther's concerns for the ethical and theological reform of the church: Scripture alone is authoritative (sola scriptura), and justification is by faith (sola fide), not by works.

Although he did not intend to break with the Catholic Church, a confrontation with the papacy was inevitable. In 1521, Luther was excommunicated; what had begun as an internal reform movement had become a fracture in Western Christendom, and the Reformation declared a heresy.

Heresy and the Bible

This Bible was printed by Christophe Plantin, a French humanist book printer and publisher. Plantin founded the prominent Antwerp publishing and printing house, Plantin Press, which continued until 1867. The company's former building is now the Plantin-Moretus Museum of Printing.



In 1562, Plantin was suspected of heresy and fled to France. He returned to Antwerp in 1564 and restarted his press at the De Gulden Passer – the Golden Compass – which featured in the frontispiece of his books. To demonstrate his orthodoxy, Plantin promised the King of Spain a printed eight-volume polyglot Bible; the King agreed and provided financial support. Twelve volumes were printed on vellum, treated calfskin, and 1,200 on paper.

This is volume six, featuring the complete Bible in Hebrew and Greek with interlinear translation in Latin. Volumes 1-5 had columns side by side, four across a page, each column in a different language. One is in Greek, Syriac, Latin, and a translation from Syriac into Hebrew. Volumes 7 and 8 contained dictionaries, lists of names and grammar rules. These volumes would have been bound according to the client's requirements, with copies bound in red Moroccan leather and others in generic bindings; this was often done to ensure they would fit within the client's library.

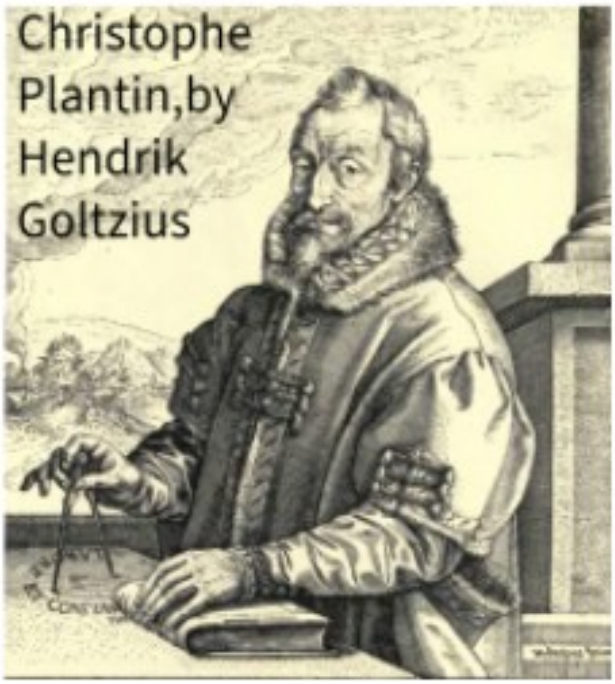
What makes this volume an interesting example is its binding. Bound in white calfskin, the Bible features portraits on both the front and the back. While the identity of the person on the rear of the volume is unclear – a male in typical Northern European ecclesiastical dress – the person on the front is very clearly identifiable. It is Martin Luther.

Why So Interesting?

This is a single volume of an eight-volume set. It is a complete copy of the Bible written in three languages: Latin, Greek and Hebrew. On the surface this may appear simple, but it is anything but.

The Bible was printed to demonstrate to a Spanish King that the printer, Plantin, was not a heretic. It was printed during a conflict that would see the same king lose territory and the founding of an independent state. The Bible is emblazoned with the image of Martin Luther, who helped fuel that state's independence movement and was at the heart of the very heresy of which Plantin was accused. The Bible is at odds with itself.

This Bible, with this binding, sits at the centre of a rupture, a moment of time when seeming continuities cease and a new normal is created. The Bible is the manifestation of the ruptures and schisms of the latter half of the 1500s. It tells a story that continues to this day. A tale of secular conflict across Europe and beyond, of the wives of Henry VIII, the Troubles of Northern Ireland, counter-reformation and the continuing division of the Christian faith from Mormons and Quakers to Jehovah's Witnesses and even the Moonies.



July 2026
Aryballos

This month, our work experience volunteer, Aimee Mathews, has written a piece about a jug that caught her eye while she was being shown around the museum's various stores. Below, she introduces herself and explains why she wanted to experience the museum.

My name is Amiee, and I go to Joyce Frankland School in Newport. I got to spend some time at the museum on work experience, and I chose it because I'm fascinated by History, how the modern world came to be, and the progress of civilisation. I got to pick out this small Aryballos juglet that originally came from Greece. I'm studying art as one of my GCSE options, and I chose the Greeks as my culture to study because I think the beliefs and delicate designs they used to tell stories over vases and other objects are something you cannot replace. I'm very grateful I got the chance to research this Aryballos juglet, as the history behind it is incredible and knowing that it belonged to someone hundreds of years ago.



A Pottery Aryballos (juglet) in Black-on-Red ware; wheel-made; globular body with a broad flat base; narrow neck with ridge, flaring to a trumpet mouth; small arching handle from shoulder to ridge; buff clay with bright red slip, decorated in black paint: bands around the neck and mouth, fine lines around the body, groups of small concentric circles on the shoulder, solid paint on handle. These juglets are often 9cm tall.

What was the purpose of Aryballos?

It has a round compact body, ideal for holding perfumed olive oil which the Greek athletes would have used before exercising. It wasn't just athletes who used these small juglets. Many locals used them too. The Greeks would exercise fully naked and would coat their bodies with the olive oil to protect themselves from the sweltering sun and dust collecting up on their skin during the hot summers. Both men and women used this for daily grooming; the oil was a substitute for things like moisturiser, soap and even deodorant. After exercising, athletes would scrape off the layer of sweat, oil and dirt using a metal tool called a strigil.

The Greeks believed the afterlife was a place where a spirit would continue doing the things they loved in life. Since sports, wrestling and working out at the palaestra (gym) were a massive part of a Greek man's identity, they believed that they would need their exercise equipment even in death. Leaving them an aryballos juglet ensured they would have their gym oil with them for eternity.



Before a body was buried or cremated, their family members would wash them in the expensive perfumed oils to show respect, but it also helped mask the smell of death. Once the ritual was finished, the same Aryballos used to perfume the deceased was often placed inside the grave or tomb alongside them.

Greeks' beliefs within the afterlife:

Religion was a massive part of Ancient Greece; many worshipped the gods and believed they had control over what happened in the afterlife. It was said that to get in the good graces of Hades and his wife Persephone, you couldn't just show up empty-handed. The botanical oils inside an aryballos were considered perfect, respectful offerings to bribe or please the gods of the dead.

Exhibitions and Events: Simon Hilton-Smith

Current Exhibition Running To - September 6 @ 5:00 pm

Life : Celebrating 100 years of David Attenborough

To celebrate sir David at 100 we are happy to be holding our current exhibition. 'LIFE'. Few have done more for the public understanding of the world. Inspiration for us all. Admission fees apply.

Next Exhibition
Late September to Christmas

Languages of Faith; Transmission of Belief

This exhibition explores how belief is communicated, embodied and experienced through words, objects, sound, image and ritual. The exhibition will create a reflective environment where visitors can sit, look, listen and consider how religious and spiritual objects convey meaning, authority, identity and devotion.

Visitors can consider how religious objects do more than represent belief: they transmit, contain, protect, perform and make belief present. The exhibition should encourage reflection on what these objects meant to the people who made, used, carried, heard or encountered them.

More details are given on Page 4 above, in the report about the Human History Collections from Simon Hilton-Smith, Collections Officer.

Learning at Saffron Walden Museum: Anna Spencer, Learning & Outreach Officer

With school visits bringing excitable groups of eager children, we have loved seeing lots of fantastic learning take place in recent weeks. The children have enjoyed handling a range of inspiring artefacts, particularly in our most popular session on Ancient Egypt: 'Tomb Raiders and Mummy Makers'. These hands-on sessions have seen classes learn about grave goods and use a simplified process to mummify dozens of tomatoes! The game 'Jar, bin, put it back in' is always a hit, designed to help children learn which organs would have been stored in canopic jars and which would have been discarded.

June and July saw several fantastic outreach sessions to Clavering Primary school. These sessions formed part of Berden village's National Lottery funded Heritage Project, organised by Natalie Trapmore; Project manager for Berden Parish Council. The sessions covered object handling and acquisition, stratigraphy, cataloguing, care for collections, museum pests, reminiscence boxes, local history and much, much more! The children were a credit to their school, engaging fully with learning about the museum's work and the history to be found within their local community.

Help us spread the word! From September we are thrilled to launch our new baby and toddler sessions. Held weekly on a Friday, these sessions will encourage babies, toddlers and their carers into the museum to explore our collections. With strong links to the objects in our care, these sessions are all about having fun. For our very youngest visitors we want to develop a life-long love of museums through play, rhyme, stories and sensory experiences that capture and hold their interest. We are especially grateful to the Museum Society, for their enthusiastic support and for funding a range of play resources needed to get us 'up and running'.
Don't forget that during the school holidays the museum puts on a range of craft activities for school aged children to come and enjoy. This summer its going to be especially wild, with our 'Wild Child Summer' sessions. There are origami birds, Wallace the lion bookmarks, animal tooth necklaces and other fun activities available to book. More details can be found on the museum website, or by visiting in person. Bookings are now live via Eventbrite. Don't miss out!

Volunteer News: Lloyd Martin, Support Officer

Hello all, I have just come up on three months working at Saffron Walden Museum as Support Officer. Over this time everyone has been incredibly welcoming, and it has been a pleasure to meet everybody at the Museum and many of the Museum Society's Members.

I want to say a massive thank you to all the volunteers for bearing with me while I have gotten familiar with all of our processes and systems. I'm pleased to say that we have had 5 new volunteers start with us over recent weeks meaning that we are well staffed for the welcome desk and should be able to make a bit of progress improving the appearance of the museum to the public.

With regards to the shop, I am planning a sale, so keep your eyes peeled for good deals! This will then be followed by the introduction of a new range of products in the shop which I hope will appeal to a wide demographic.
If you fancy meeting me or want to give me suggestions to improve the customer experience in the museum, please feel free to pop in and say 'hello'! I work Monday-Friday excluding Wednesday and my email is lmartin@uttlesford.gov.uk.

Thank you again to our wonderful staff, volunteers, and members for making my first few months here so enjoyable. I hope you all have a fantastic summer!

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
- Annual General Meeting – Attend and vote; have your say in how the Museum Society is run.

Reports on Talks

13 April 2026
An Introduction to Wimpole Hall
The story of a country house from the English Civil War to the daughter of Rudyard Kipling.
Speaker; Richard Priestley

Richard is now in his 18th year as a volunteer guide at Wimpole Hall, which he took up after retiring as Head of Newport Grammar School. He told the story of the house, beginning in 1640 with Thomas Chicheley who was M.P. for Cambridgeshire, and rebuilt the house from a former moated house the site of which lies just to the north east of the current building under the grass lawns. The central part of the current house was then built, interrupted by the Civil War. However by 1686 he was bankrupt and forced to sell the house. Three owners then succeeded each other for short periods, the final being John Holles in 1711 who died the same year and left the house to his daughter Lady Henrietta Cavendish Holles, who married Edward Harley. They turned the house into a centre for the Arts and attracted artists, musicians and authors to the house. He added the wings, designed by James Gibbs. He then became bankrupt and the house was sold to Philip Yorke, who was Prime Minister from 1754 to 62, the 1st Earl of Hardwicke. His longest legacy to the country was the Marriage Act, which set out requirement that are still followed to this day. The family continued in the house, with the 2nd Earl employing Capability Brown to re-landscape the grounds in 1769. The 3rd Earl met John Soane on his Grand Tour in Italy and they became friends, Soane did works in parts of the house rearranging the interior to form larger rooms, as well as the Great Barn and the glasshouse in the walled garden. The 4th Earl Charles Yorke built the Stable Block that

is now the main visitor centre. The 5th Earl was known as 'Champagne Charlie' due to his lifestyle and connections to the Prince of Wales, later Edward VII. By 1894 there was a £300,000 debt, and the property was sold to the Ager Robates family. Sold again in 1933 to William Henry Abbey who did not live there but rented it out, and one of the first renters from 1937 to 39 was Captain George Bambridge and his wife Elsie, the daughter of Rudyard Kipling. Her inherited money later bought the house, and after her husband died she continued to live there for 30 years until the property then passed to the National Trust.

This very compressed note of the details of Richard's talk reveals that there is much to see at Wimpole Hall, which is well worth a visit.

Tony Morton

11 May 2026
Hamsters and Rabbit Holes
Speaker Ross Midgley

Ross has been a resident of Hempstead for over 30 years, but upon recent retirement in 2024 he began to catalogue old documents in the village, which led to many discoveries, leading him down 'rabbit holes' into the past.

The village had collected the documents in and around the year 2000 and had set up a website to display them at < hempsteadhistory.uk > but with his cataloguing he has done much more research leading to the publication of his book ' Walking the Hamster to the Fountain: A Thousand Years of History in Hempstead, Essex by Midgley, Ross (ISBN: 9781916966871) . Available from the website < https://hempsteadhistory.uk/books/ > and it is also available in Harts bookshop.

The title comes from a recorded interview with a former resident, recalling summers between the wars when the wells dried up. People had to 'walk into Hempstead to the fountain' for water. When this was transcribed by software that translates speech to text, the computer garbled the message and produced the hamster.

Well known people connected to the village were William Harvey, Admiral Sir Eliab Harvey and Dick Turpin, though none of them lived in the village for very long, In the following generation Eliab Harvey was an entrepreneur trading with Constantinople; a 'Turkey Merchant', who became so wealthy that he bought the whole of the land in the parish.

Another piece of village history relates to Hempstead Hall which was used as a Farm Colony from the late 1800s taking in orphaned children and training them in skills which would enable them to emigrate to Australia and Canada.

You can read these stories and more if you buy the book

8 June 2026
The History of Malting in Bishops Stortford and its impact on the town.
Speaker; Tim Howard-Smith

Malting is known in the town from records dating from 1760, though the process is much older than than that, with evidence in the middle east dating to 13,000 BP. The quality of drinking water was unreliable, but brewing was a way of producing a purified drink, from barley which goes through the process of steeping, germinating, drying and roasting to produce the malt which is then used in brewing.

Early brewing produced Ale, which is an un-hopped but fermented drink. Later beer was flavoured with hops from the 14th century onwards, but this also needed cellar storage to mature. From the 17th century products included brown beer lightly hopped, mild beer, un-aged and lightly hopped, small beer drunk at table with an alcohol content about 1%, safer to drink than water but it was taxed. London Porter drove the malt trade in this area. Trumans and Whitbread were associated with the area from early on. George Hodgson at Bromley-byBow developed India Pale Ale for export to India.

Why was this area important? In West Essex Barley is the main crop, and the Lea Valley and Stort Valley became the cradle of the malting industry. Wells into the chalk provided good quality water for malting. Some of the maltings in Bishops Stortford can still be seen for example at 'Coopers of Stortford', and several other locations.

The rivers in the area also provided a solution to the transport problem, though the barley was moved to Bishops Storford in large wagons called 'drugges' drawn by 6 or 8 horses and carrying 6 tons. The first steps in making the Stort Navigation date from a 1759 Canal Act, though lack of finance meant that it was not built at that time, but eventually Jackson did build it, with a transport basin in the town, where the Jackson Square shopping centre now stands.

The wealth generated by malting was important for the town, leading to professional classes moving here, like doctors and lawyers, and there is a link with Congregationalist dissenters. By 1800 there were100 maltings in the town (and 40 in Saffron Walden). The town grew enormously, for example John Taylor moved here from Ware, to become a maltster, and also to develop the barge traffic in conjunction with Truman's brewery. The wealth led to the development of banking in the town. The coming of the railways might have been thought as a great advantage, but in reality it meant that transport could be from much further away, and Burton-upon Trent captured the London market, with a better water supply for brewing, and this ended the monopoly of Bishops Stortford. By the end of World War 1 there were only three maltings left in operation, and the final one, Taylors, stopped in 1969.

Tony Morton

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