



D M A Newsletter

March 2014

Editorial

David M Riches

Welcome to the March 2014 Newsletter. Can I firstly thank all the contributors to this issue for their interesting and varied articles. It was sad news that Sturminster Mill had been flooded in the recent bout of storms. I hope that the damage was not too severe.

The report from Shaftesbury Abbey of their visit to the Philpot Museum in Lyme Regis was interesting as it reminded me that a couple of years ago a group of us from Weymouth Museum visited a number of other museums in Dorset to talk to their curators and discover how they did things as a precursor to designing the layout and displays for the future, new Weymouth Museum. I wrote a report on these visits, intending it to accompany our HLF bid to help justify our future plans. This is still intended when we recommence our bidding. Weymouth Museum is now entirely volunteer run and I think the volunteer run museums can learn a lot from visiting other museums and discussions with their staff.

Weymouth Museum has a very active Friends organisation (a separate charity whose aim is to support the museum by raising funds and providing volunteers) and it organises events during the year in support of the museum. One of these is the series of spring and autumn 'Teas & Talks', twelve talks in all, held in a local church hall, that are attended by 60 to 80 people each time and which are helping to raise the £10,000 they have pledged as match funding for our future HLF bid. Do your museums have Friends organisations? Do you circulate the Newsletter to them? Why not do so, and also encourage them to write articles for it?

David

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Bridport Museum Spring 2014

Emily Hicks, Curator

Counting by Numbers

At our Volunteer's Christmas drinks in December, we compiled a review of the year in numbers. We thought you might enjoy them as a glimpse behind the scenes in Bridport! Some were a little, erm, estimated rather than counted exactly....!

Number of adults visiting the Museum: 13556
Number of children visiting the Museum: 2650
Estimated number of cups of tea and coffee drunk by staff and volunteers: 1900
Conservative estimate of number of biscuits consumed by said staff and volunteers: 2052
Amount of money raised from the 2nd hand book sale : £2570.26
Number of visitors to the Local History Centre: 765
Number of Heritage Lottery Applications: 1
Amount of hours spent on said application: off the scale.
Number of fossils that have been photographed for a new Jurassic Coast database: 93
Number of TV production companies we have helped with research: 2
Number of film production companies we've helped with research: 1
Number of Roman soldiers visiting the Museum: 1
Number of meetings attended by Emily, the Curator: 86
Number of children taught on school visits: 1111
Number of volunteers who've helped: 61
Number of photographs taken of our archaeology collection by one volunteer: 2940
Estimate of the number of people attending Museum talks: 700
Number of well-known broadcasters we've helped with research: 1
Number of photographs now on our Flickr site: 589
Number of volunteer hours spent helping researchers: 1347
Number of volunteer hours spent working on the collection: 1129
Number of volunteer hours spent in the museum: 2536
Number of times the Museum was flooded: 1

I wonder how 2014 will shaped up in comparison!

New Exhibitions for 2014

Now, looking forward to this season, we open on Saturday 5th April with three new exhibitions:

Drawing Inspiration... From West Bay: curated by volunteer David Alcock, this is an exhibition of paintings and drawings of West Bay from our collection. They have been selected because they capture changes over time—both from nature, and from man. This is part of a Dorset Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty project across the AONB area— find out more here: <http://www.dorsetaonb.org.uk/our-work/drawing-inspiration2> . This exhibition will also feature online to allow people to discuss the paintings, and add their own images and photographs if they want to.

Feathers, Fur and Frills: improvements in our stores last year has enabled us for the first time in many years to explore our incredible natural history collection once again. The collection, which comprises around 100 birds and a variety of mammals, were all collected by the Revered Hutton and given to the Museum in the 1930s. Several different displays will explore these collections, alongside our social history and textile collections.

The Chideock Egg Lady: One Woman's Role in the First World War:

this exhibition has been curated by local writer Frances Colville, who has spent a long time transcribing letters from our collection, using them both to inspire her own writing, and to put together this exhibition which commemorates the 100th anniversary of the start of World War I. This archive is known as the 'egg letters': written by soldiers in hospital to a Chideock lady, Chrissie Squire.

Frances tells us a little more about the fascinating collection:

“Chrissie found a way of making a unique contribution to the war effort. She became involved with the National Egg Collection. This was an initiative set up in the early days of the war under the patronage of Queen Alexandra to collect eggs and distribute them amongst wounded soldiers in France to provide additional and much needed sustenance. The scheme continued throughout the war and an astonishing number (well in excess of 20 million) of eggs found their way into hospitals over the course of the four years. 64,000 passed through the collection centre in Bridport Town Hall and of these Chrissie certainly contributed hundreds, as we know from various receipts she saved and awards she was given. More importantly, she personalised her eggs, putting her name and address on to them, painting intricate little pictures and sometimes adding a poem or an encouraging word. In return she received many letters from soldiers thanking her, and giving her snippets of information about their lives. These letters were saved by Chrissie, and then by her niece and are currently held at our Local History Centre.

We know that often there was a lottery or draw to determine which man in a hospital ward would be lucky enough to receive the decorated egg. And we know that some of the soldiers either kept the whole egg rather than destroying the paintings or managed in some way to blow the egg out and preserve the shell. We don't know if any of these eggs are still in existence.

Grimness pervades all the letters, despite obvious attempts to hide the worst from the folks back home. Here are just a few examples:

A Gunner from the Canadian Artillery writes in January 1916 “I have a poisoned compound fracture just below R. knee joint. Am doing very well now. And they expect to save my leg. I hope they do too. Was bit in 5 other places but nothing serious. This lying on one's back day after day, not able to move, certainly does get on your nerves. It won't last for ever tho' that's some consolation”.

Another soldier from the same hospital in France says “I have been out here 11 months. I have seen life and death, brave sturdy lads in the fullness of manhood marching to take their allotted places in the firing line. I have seen them come back. No picture ever painted, no dreams could make you realise the sight that meets your eyes no thunder claps was ever known when you are between the fire of hundreds of big guns. The scene is one of utter desolation it gives you an idea of what would be the end of the world.”

Many of the letters give us a strong sense of the loneliness of the soldiers, especially those who are far from home, and their gratitude that someone has taken the trouble to think of them. Often the writers ask Chrissie if she will write back to them or send a photograph or even if they can visit her next time they get back to 'Blighty'

We can only speculate whether Chrissie entered into correspondence with any of the writers or even whether she went further and met up with any of them, or embarked on a relationship. It seems reasonable to assume that she may at the very least have written a reply to some of those who asked her to do so.”

Entry to Bridport Museum and all of our exhibitions is still free, so please do come and visit us and say hello this year!



New Exhibition at Dorset County Museum

A Dorset Woman at War: Mabel Stobart and the Retreat from Serbia 1915.

Saturday 31 May to Saturday 15 November 2014

Summer 2014 will see a special exhibition at Dorset County Museum commemorating the centenary of the start of the First World War. The exhibition will focus on the story of one Dorset woman, Mabel St Clair Stobart, exploring her life and the role she played during the epic retreat of the Serbian army in 1915.

The Museum has a collection of unique photographs recording Mabel Stobart's experiences in Serbia. They trace her intrepid journey from the tented field hospital she established near the front line and the relentless 250 mile trek through the Albanian mountains to her final escape from Scutari. Already in her mid-fifties, she travelled to Serbia with female doctors and nurses whom she had recruited and trained to help the war effort. Her story is exceptional, not only for the adventures she experienced - in 1914 she had been arrested by the Germans and sentenced to be shot as a spy - but because she was motivated by bettering the lot of women. A supporter of the Suffragette movement, Stobart believed that women should earn the vote by demonstrating that they were as valuable to society as men. She led her mission to Serbia in the face of opposition from another famous Dorset figure, Sir Frederick Treves, who felt there was no place for women in the Serbian conflict.

The photographs of Stobart's adventures are highly graphic and do not flinch from the horrors of war. It was notable that as well as managing all aspects of her medical team she still had an eye to the future by organizing these photographs. When Kodak developed them for her subsequent lecture tour of America, they were so impressed that they were blown up, mounted and hung in the Kodak head office.

The exhibition will reveal the extraordinary story of a powerful and determined woman who frequented the salons of London Society but was also a feminist, playwright and farmer. A born organiser, Stobart was daring and fearless. She buried two husbands and tragically lost both sons in the Spanish flu epidemic. As a result she became a spiritualist with Conan Doyle and held séances like those shown recently in Downton Abbey!

The exhibition opens at Dorset County Museum on Saturday 31 May 2014 and runs until 15 November 2014.

Rachel Cole

Dorset County Museum

Tel: 01305 262735 or email rachel@dorsetcountymuseum.org



Painting of Mabel Stobart

Credit: George Rankin, Lady of the Black Horse, 1916, Red Cross Museum and Archives, courtesy of Studland Village Hall Committee

Museum of Design in Plastics

The worldwide hunt is on

As stars of the snow compete in the Sochi Winter Olympics, a quiz question is circulating around the world: who designed the first plastic laminated skis and where were they made? That's just one of the questions a new crowd sourcing game for the web is asking about artefacts in the Museum of Design in Plastics.

The Museum of Design in Plastics at the Arts University Bournemouth has been awarded £30,000 to help develop a game that asks anyone with access to the web to provide missing information on cultural artefacts made of plastic.

Internet crowd-sourcing projects in the past have asked the public to help classify galaxies from space photographs and to transcribe weather observations from old ship logs to support climate research. The new game is in the style of FBI-style posters called the '10 Most Wanted'. Objects on the Wanted list are selected by the museum curators and are replaced with new challenges once the missing information is found and verified. Players collaborate through the game platform and social channels, where they also can communicate with curators.

Posters ask a variety of questions. One shows a football and asks: "The first plastic football was made in the 1960s. This one has 14 instead of 32 panels, to help keep its shape better. Who made the breakthrough to reduce the number of panels?" Plastic travel toothbrushes and plastic cameras are other subjects for the game. The toothbrush is considered well suited for crowd-sourcing because many people have owned one and may know something about it such as: the shop where they bought it; the shop may have records of the wholesale trader, the wholesale trader might know who manufactured it, and the manufacturer may know who designed it.

While the developed game involves details of plastic artefacts, the approach and methodology can be easily rolled out to other materials and contexts, such as identifying people and places in paintings and photographs, recording public narratives around historic buildings and monuments, or gathering back stories of poster campaigns.

Other organisations involved in the project are the University of Brighton which is the research partner, and Adaptive Technologies, a Hove-based company which makes websites and web applications for museums, galleries, archives and community groups in the UK and abroad. The project's funding, which totals £120,000, comes from the Digital R & D Fund for the Arts, supported by Nesta, Arts & Humanities Research Council, and public funding by the National Lottery through Arts Council England.

For more information, go to: www.10most.org.uk and to join the discussion on Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/groups/1396648167216137/>

Phil Mills
University of Brighton





PORTLAND MUSEUM

Pam Boyce

If you are a fan of “Countryfile” on BBC 1 on a Sunday evening, you will have hopefully enjoyed the edition on 23rd February, which featured the Isle of Portland. The Museum was lucky enough to be invited to take part in the filming, which concentrated in no small part on Dr Marie Stopes, the Museum’s founder and first honorary curator, who had a holiday home at the Old Higher Lighthouse at Portland Bill from the 1920s. The lady who currently lives in at the Higher Light had a very amusing conversation with presenter, Matt Baker, about Marie Stopes and her somewhat radical lifestyle, which included sunbathing on the rocks at the Bill, with very little to cover her modesty! She attracted a host of celebrated people of the times, including George Bernard Shaw and Margot Fonteyn, who visited her on Portland. Thomas Hardy was a friend and a regular visitor, and of course, both of these great characters of the 20th century come together in Portland Museum; she as the founder, and Hardy the novelist, who identified one of the 17th century museum cottages to be the home of his heroine in “The Wellbeloved”, Avice Caro. The cottage is still referred to as “Avice’s Cottage” today.

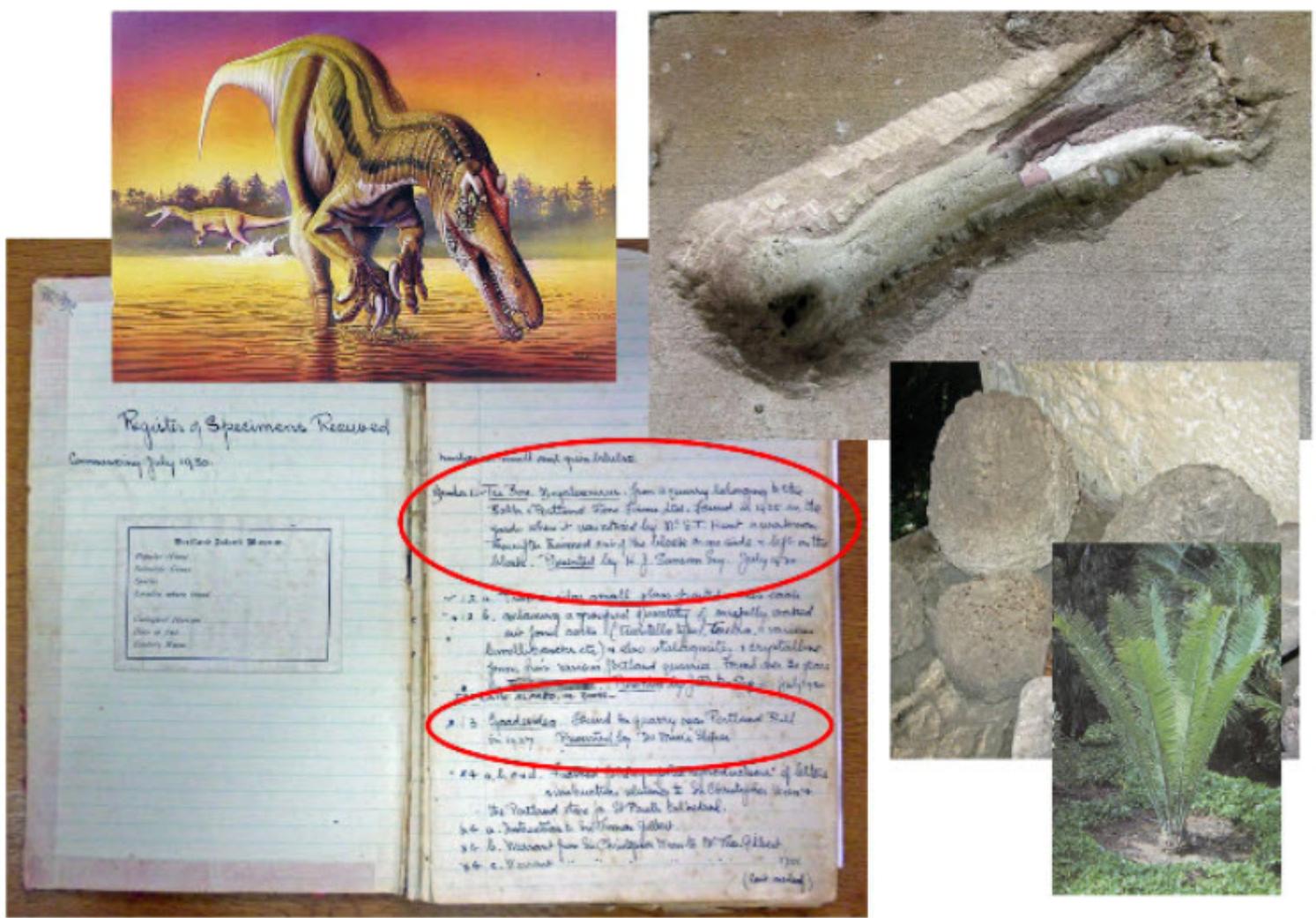
Our very own David Carter was interviewed about the fossils we have in the Museum, and David was able to show Matt Baker the original Accession Register, with the first entries written in Marie Stopes’ own hand, for two of the fossils being featured in the programme; a cycad, and the toe bone of a megalosaurus, preserved in the original stone.

The programme also covered the quarrying of Portland Stone, Portland Harbour, and the diverse and unique wildlife and habitat on the Island, giving viewers who don’t know this special place, an interesting insight into our

part of the world. I would, however, take issue with “Countryfile’s” description of Portland as being “off the Dorset coast”. When I last looked, it was well and truly attached to the mainland, but perhaps the programme makers anticipated that Chesil Beach would be swept away in the recent storms!

Like most of you, I suspect, we are eagerly preparing for another season of visitors, and our exhibitions and displays have been refreshed and replaced on quite a major scale this year. We are lucky to have so many aspects of Portland history to choose from and it is very gratifying to see some of the stored objects come out of their packaging and back on display again.

Portland Museum has been invited to contribute to a special events programme to commemorate the two World Wars, during the Veterans’ Week organised by Weymouth & Portland Borough Council in June this year. A bid has been submitted to the Heritage Lottery Fund by the Council to fund extra activities and events to mark the centenary of the start of World War One. The Museum hopes to put on a special exhibition called “Portland at War” during Veterans’ Week, and hopefully attract locals as well as visitors to see how Portland contributed to the war effort and how it was changed by it. Portland Harbour played a major role in the embarkation of American troops to the D-Day Beaches in 1944, and HMS Hood, was sunk in one of the Harbour entrances, acting as a block ship against torpedo attack before the start of World War I. Sadly, one inevitable and lasting association Portland has with both World Wars is the manufacture of hundreds of thousands of headstones for war graves, and a special quarry almost opposite the museum was opened to extract stone for the Cenotaph in London. Whilst the choice of Portland Stone recognises the uniqueness of this local material, and the skill of Portland craftsmen who fashioned it and carved the names of the dead, it is a permanent reminder of the tragedy of war and the monumental loss of life over the two conflicts.



SHAFTESBURY ABBEY

Bill Owen, Chairman

The Abbey always has the benefit of a Dorset Small Museums' adviser. She is currently Vicki de Wit who is carrying on to give us the same enormous support that David Tucker previously provided. When David retired to take over as Curator at Lyme Regis museum he invited Sue and myself to go and see him there. So we set off there in late November when sadly there was neither sun nor visitors in the town.

The museum in Bridge street is impressive and left us wishing that our museum was in the heart of the town. It is close to the sea front and a stones throw from the theatre where their meetings and lectures can take place. Interestingly it was sited on the very spot where Mary Anning, the renowned (and totally self-taught) fossilist once lived in a very modest cottage. The museum dates from 1902 but was only opened some twenty years later. The design is described in their brochure as "Gothic revival with Arts & Craft overtones". Quite a title and a terrific exterior! It is a very good museum and there's a lot more to it than the fossils.

David Tucker is his usual enthusiastic self and is hoping to raise funds to extend the museum. They are certainly short of storage space but the interior is on three levels with an open spiral staircase and rotunda at the top. You can look down through the levels below you as well seeing the town and famous Cob beyond.

The exhibits include a huge fossilised skull of an ichthyosaur found recently. What is there in its new display case is five feet long and marvellously preserved but the entire creature would have been over five times bigger. The exhibits aren't just archaeological but include items concerning the towns residents (many writers) and maritime history. If you have the time and your companion is long-suffering, you can spend a long time here!

David also has the good fortune to have as a museum member the American novelist Tracy Chevalier who lives in England and spends part of the year in Dorset. She of course wrote "Remarkable Creatures" about Mary Anning's extraordinary life. Mary was described by the normally reserved folk at the London Natural History Museum as "the greatest fossil hunter ever known". Quite an accolade for someone with no formal education at all. The novel is excellent and will surely follow "Girl with the Pearl Earring" and become a film one day.

Another supporter of the Lyme museum is David Attenborough who came and talked to its members recently and (inevitably) filled the theatre. Our curator says that the oddest moment that day was when he took a call and heard that world famous voice prosaically asking for directions en route to Lyme Regis!

Do go and see this museum and hope for a sunnier day than we had!

STURMINSTER NEWTON MUSEUM & MILL SOCIETY

John Pidgeon

'What occurs once in a minute; twice in a week and once in a year but not at all in a fortnight?' (answer at end of report). This was just one of the many questions asked in our successful Quiz Night on Friday 17th January attended by 70 people.

We should like to give a huge thank you to all of you who have very kindly pledged donations towards the extension of the museum for a new display/education room. We have now received sufficient pledges so that we can proceed with our application for the main funding from the Heritage Lottery Fund, which we hope, will be successful.

Our new display in the museum commemorates the 100th anniversary of the start of the Great War and includes details of major events from 1914 - 1920, war time posters, medals, memorabilia plus personal stories about local families plus caps and helmets for children to try on. In addition the Sturminster home front of 1914 is compared with that of the 2nd World War 25 years later. Please come in to see this exhibition and look at our new selection of Dad's Army gifts in the shop.

Christmas also saw the highest flood levels in Sturminster mill for almost 100 years. On Christmas Eve the flood in the mill exceeded the highest level recorded since 1916 reaching almost five feet deep. After Christmas we found that all the furniture in the mill had been afloat and the floor was covered in slippery mud.

Our coming talks are on Thursday 13th March at the Exchange where the topic will be 'Benjamin Jesty, Dorset's Vaccination Pioneer' by Patrick Pead. The following talk will be on Wednesday 2nd April again at the Exchange with the topic 'Taxidermy - My Way' presented by Jonathan McGowan.

Answer to question - the letter 'E'.



Wareham Museum

Ben Buxton, Assistant Curator

Wareham Museum is marking its 40th birthday with “Digging deeper: a celebration of Wareham’s heritage”, a morning of talks in Wareham Town Hall on Saturday 26 April, 10-1. The panel of speakers includes well-known local archaeologist Lilian Ladle MBE covering 2000 years of Wareham’s history, and there will be talks on Saxon Wareham, the medieval castle, and preserving the town’s heritage. In the afternoon there will be a guided walk around Wareham. Entry is by a donation of £3 on the door, but places must be reserved by contacting Wareham Town Council on 01929 553006 or office@wareham-tc.gov.uk For further details see our website www.wtm.org.uk

We are also marking the anniversary and encouraging participation by running a competition among young people to design a logo for the anniversary year.

The museum opens for the season on Friday 4th April and there will be grand opening ceremony on Saturday 5th at 10. We have a number of new displays or temporary exhibitions this season: a new Jurassic Coast display, a World War One display (from July), an exhibition on HMS Cattistock which was sponsored by Wareham in World War 2, and the Wareham Saxon sword is returning on loan from Dorchester.



Remains of the 10th century sword found in the River Frome in 1927. An inscription on the handle indicates it belonged to a member of the royal family of Wessex (Ben Buxton)

Wareham’s Saxon walls, the best preserved Saxon town defences in England (Ben Buxton)



Secret Stories from the Priest's House Museum, Wimborne

Tam Gilbert, Persuasion Arts

Over three Saturday mornings in January, an integrated team of professional disabled and non-disabled artists from local theatre companies, State of Play Arts (Tony Horitz) and Persuasion Arts (Tam Gilbert and Paul Wilshaw), worked with a small group of disabled participants, on a new HLF funded project, gathering stories from personal artefacts and the Priest's House Museum's collections.

The aim of the project was to introduce disabled people to the museum and encourage them to interact with the rooms and their artefacts; to feel comfortable about exploring and working in an environment, which, for many was unknown territory. Museums can be daunting places for some disabled people who may have trouble accessing the information, let alone physically navigating their way around.

With the museum closed to the public, ropes were discarded and our group were able to roam the ground floor, handling objects and even interacting with the mannequins!

As a co-facilitator of the project with a love of history and fond childhood memories of Wimborne and the museum's tea room - a disabled person myself - I was as keen as our participants to work amongst the artefacts and find out more about their stories.

As well as creating powerful and evocative stories through drama, the group toured the museum and stores, whilst being fascinated by tales from Curator, Emma Ayling. Mid-way through the course we were given the opportunity to toast crumpets on the fire in the kitchen.

For our final session, we created a site-specific story where, inspired by their personal objects, each group chose a space that best suited their placing, and devised mini-stories. One participant, commented, "I enjoyed setting up my 'museum' with my fossils. It was good listening to other people's ideas and sharing our work."

These drama workshops formed the early stages of a longer-term project, where State of Play and Persuasion Arts plan to develop a professional play, celebrating disabled people's lives in Dorset. This will be produced at the museum later in the year. We hope to find funding for the group to meet regularly, to continue their exploration of the museum. As one mother told us afterwards, "Nina gained confidence and you managed to achieve so much in such a short time. It was brilliant."

An unexpected bonus of our workshops was that three participants have signed up to volunteer at the museum.



This is who we are



Special objects display



Participant with doll's house



Tour of the stores

Forthcoming events at the Priest's House

Lost Tracks – Remembering East Dorset's Railways

1 Apr to 30 Jun, Mon to Sat 10 to 4.30

An exhibition exploring the people who travelled to and from, and worked at East Dorset's railway stations from the mid 1940s to the mid 1960s.

Admission charge

Uniforms for All

1 Apr to 11 Nov, Mon to Sat 10 to 4.30

An exhibition showcasing uniforms from the museum's costume and textile collection.

Admission charge

Buster Bunny's Big Easter Activities

5 Apr to 19 Apr, Mon to Sat 10 to 4.30

Self directed craft activities.

Admission charge

Rediscovering Saxon England

Thu 10 Apr, 7.30pm

Dr David Reeve will reveal findings from his extensive research into the ancient history of Wimborne.

Tickets £6 (booking essential)

'Do You Really Call that Progress, Mr Marples?': The politics of railway closures in East Dorset

Fri 2 May, 7.30pm

With Professor Colin Divall, Professor of Railway Studies, University of York.

Tickets £6 (booking essential)

For further information and details of additional events please contact the museum on 01202 882533 or visit our website at www.priest-house.co.uk.

Follow the Priest's House Museum & Garden on Twitter <http://twitter.com/priestshouse> and Facebook <http://www.facebook.com/pages/Priests-House-Museum-Garden/367342006646069>.

Octagon Theatre – 40th Anniversary

James Lewis, South Somerset Community Heritage Access Centre

The Octagon Theatre, in Hendford, Yeovil, well known throughout Somerset and Dorset, celebrates its 40th Anniversary in 2014.

Joseph Lewis, Heritage Information Assistant at South Somerset District Council's Community Heritage Access Centre is helping with an exhibition to celebrate the occasion and shares some of the history of public halls and theatres in Yeovil.

Yeovil's first town hall was constructed in 1849 minus its clock tower, which was added in 1864. The first town hall clock tower was declared unsafe and removed in 1887. The clock tower was re-erected in 1913 with four dials around six feet in diameter and the top of the turret nearly 100ft above the pavement.

In April 1928, King George Street and new Municipal Buildings were constructed. The High Street Town Hall burnt down on 22 September 1935. This led to the purchase of Hendford Manor House the following year, with the intention of clearing the site for a new town hall and the creation of a civic centre. However, opposition to the proposal and the outbreak of war in 1939 deferred the scheme, although the Law Courts were built in Petter's Way in 1938. It was not until the building of Maltravers House in 1969 to house County Council and Government Departments, followed by the multi-purpose Johnson Civic Hall in 1974, that any further development of this area took place.

The Johnson Hall was built on the gardens of Hendford Manor and named in honour of the donor that provided a fund for a public hall in Yeovil. In 1984, ten years after the opening, it was recognised that the building was more effective as a theatre. Following a public newspaper competition, in 1984, "Octagon" was chosen as the new name for the theatre. Mr Johnson is remembered in the Johnson Suite. Subsequent refurbishments and extensions were made in 2003 and 2008.

One of the most intriguing finds during this research was how close Yeovil came to having a 'cultural quarter' in Hendford. Recently discovered plans, dating from 1961, show council offices, museum and library in a circular building and a new civic hall. There was even a model produced of the civic hall to be built at a cost of £150,000. The site of the planned civic hall is now taken by the Octagon Theatre.

The Community Heritage Access Centre has a notable photographic archive related to Yeovil South Somerset and the surrounding area. Visits are welcome by appointment.

(01935) 462855. 07971 111 890. heritage.services@southsomerset.gov.uk
www.southsomersetheritage.org.uk

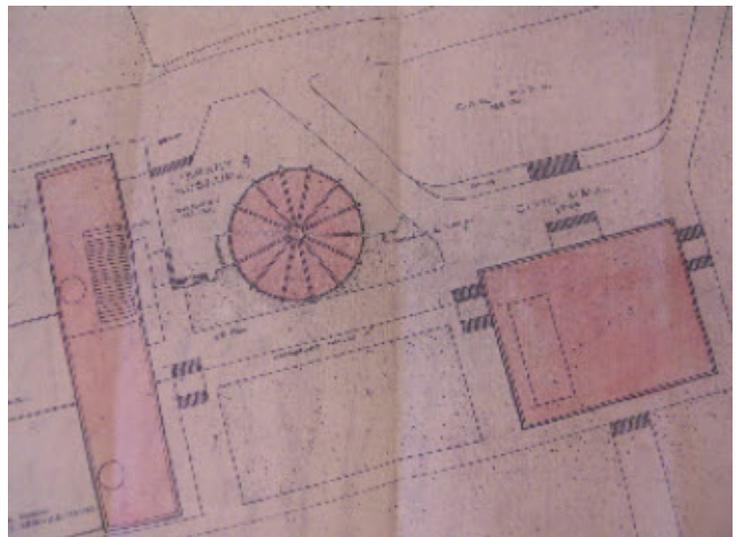
Gratitude to the following sources:

Brooke, Leslie, Yeovil: A Pictorial History (Phillimore & Co Ltd) West Sussex, 1994

Brooke, Leslie, The Book of Yeovil (Barracuda Books Ltd) Buckingham, 1978

Ansell, Robin, Barnes, Marion, Around Yeovil (Chalford Publishing) 1995

Recently discovered plans from 1961 reveal the extent of the intended Civic Centre, Library and Museum in Hendford





View of the Borough, Yeovil around 1928 showing the later clock tower re-erected in 1913.

A competition in the local press led to the successful entry for a new name "The Octagon". This image shows a later extension and an award ceremony



Weymouth Museum

David Riches

Weymouth Museum has now reopened. On December 6th, to coincide with the Victorian Evening in Weymouth, in front of about a hundred guests, the Chairman of Weymouth Museum Trust, Councillor Margaret Leicester, cut the ribbon across the entrance and welcomed those present, and then the Deputy Mayor of Weymouth, Councillor Kate Wheller spoke, expressing her pleasure that the museum had reopened.

December 11th was actually the first day it was open to the public. It has now closed again for the winter but will open again on April 2nd. A team is now working feverishly preparing the second gallery. Once again the lighting and panelling has had to be restored and re-painted before the displays can be installed.

The local history and information team have been answering a steady stream of enquiries and we have also received several groups of items for the museum collection and are still doing so as I write this. This is keeping the collections team busy as well, accessioning and documenting them. I hope to describe some of these in future newsletters.

Beaminster Museum - Hidden Treasure!

Brian Earl

I doubt that Beaminster Museum is alone in being indebted to individuals from long ago who painstakingly collected and recorded information about their local area. Our own hero is a shy, unassuming pharmacist called Richard (Dicky) Hine, who published his *History of Beaminster* exactly 100 years ago. We invariably refer to the book during any research-based activities.

The book's own story actually starts with Hutchins in the 18th century. The monumental *History of Dorset* was ill-received by one Beaminster resident, a solicitor called John Banger Russell. Russell's complaint was that Hutchins had never visited Beaminster, thereby rendering his account 'most deficient'. Russell then took it upon himself to compile his own history of the town. It was never published, but Hine had access to the manuscript and used much of its content before bringing it up to date with everything that had happened in the intervening period. His was therefore the first publication devoted entirely to Beaminster's past.

As part of the centenary celebrations we planned to establish a small display of what we knew about Hine and the book. Gill Cheeseman, a new volunteer in our ranks, was tasked with making the display as interesting and attractive as possible. We already possessed some appropriate artefacts in our collection, but had no great expectations of coming up with anything new and exciting. Then, quite out of the blue, a colleague reported a conversation at Dorset County Museum during which it transpired that some 'Hine scrapbooks' had recently been liberated from the vaults and indexed. After a flurry of exit forms, entry forms and insurance checks, Gill subsequently collected two crates on loan from Dorchester.

And what a treasure trove it turned out to be! The leather-bound tomes, lovingly assembled by Dicky Hine, contained letters, photographs, newspaper cuttings and other documents that added hugely to our knowledge of the man himself and of Beaminster in Victorian and Edwardian times.

One fascinating gem was the news that Hine almost certainly never set out to write a book in the first place. It now seems clear that he did all his research as a hobby, first going public, and possibly reluctantly at that, in 1904 with a couple of fund-raising 'panoramic lectures' in Beaminster's newly-built Public Hall. It was at the second of these evenings that the Vicar, acting as chairman for the evening, promised the audience that he would attempt to persuade the speaker to turn his lecture notes into a book. Ten years later the book finally went on sale at 16s 6d.

Another intriguing discovery was that Hine came within a hair's breadth of establishing Beaminster Museum in a side room of the Public Hall before World War One, and of being its first curator. We had to wait until the 1990s for his vision to become a reality. A Hine-inspired pilot included an exhibition of birds' eggs and one or two other items that might raise a few eyebrows these days.

The scrapbooks have certainly enlivened the display. I think Gill has realised that such miracles are unlikely to occur for *every* job she undertakes.