



D M A Newsletter

March 2013

Editorial

David M Riches

As this is the first issue in 2013 I would like to start by wishing all our readers and contributors a happy and successful new year.

Regrettably, for some reason as yet unexplained, the number of articles I have received for this issue has fallen sharply and this issue is therefore about half its normal size. None-the-less, I hope that you will find the articles as interesting as I have. The next issue is due for publication at the beginning of June and I will welcome articles for it at any time between now and then. Whilst I always aim for publication at the start of the month I am always willing to wait a couple of days for an extra article.

Weymouth Museum

David M Riches

In December the developers, Brewers Quay Investments LLP, finally came up with some new plans for the building, which they have discussed with the Borough Council planning department and also Weymouth Museum Trust. Unfortunately the plans were not satisfactory either from the planning point of view or for the new museum; there have been some revisions since but they are still far from satisfactory and negotiations are continuing, slowed by the holidays of both WPBC officers and the developers. We are now awaiting a tripartite meeting between the developers, WPBC officers, and ourselves.

Because the new plans and financial arrangements are so very different from those previously envisioned Weymouth Museum Trust have agreed with the HLF to withdraw from their round 2 bid and will start the whole process again once new plans and financial arrangements are agreed.

Meanwhile parts of Brewers Quay are to re-open in April with an antiques emporium occupying much of the ground floor and, apparently, a private military museum in the former bowling alley. The developers still say that they want the Weymouth Museum to reopen but are not providing the necessary funding or a suitable alternative space for this to happen although they are obliged to do this under the existing museum agreement with WPBC. However a small team of volunteers are working in the building preparing an inventory of the items donated from the Timewalk prior to considering them for accessioning, adding to a handling collection, or disposal.

The small exhibition mounted by the Friends in the Ivy Coffee House in Cove Row is now open and is proving to be very popular. Its displays show the development of Weymouth Harbour, onto which the Coffee House fronts, and include models of the SS St Julian and a paddle steamer from the museum collection, as well as a cabinet of Weymouth souvenir china, also from the museum collection.

This has encouraged the museum volunteers to consider other external exhibitions and one is now being planned in conjunction with Weymouth Library that will show the development of the town in its vicinity.

Bridport Museum

Emily Hicks, Curator

Bridport Museum Opens for the 2013 Season

Bridport Museum opens its doors for the 2013 season on Saturday 23rd March at 10am. As always there are lots of new exhibitions for visitors to enjoy. There will be an exhibition of old photographs of the town, including a print of a newly restored early panoramic photograph taken from St. Mary's Church tower. The photograph itself is far too delicate to be put on display, but a double size print of it will allow visitors to see details and pick out buildings and spots in the town that they recognise.

Another display has been put together by the Peverell Quilters. The group visited the museum last season to look at some of the quilts and textiles from the collection. They have chosen favourite things connected to Bridport to inspire the creation of 10 new quilts which include images like the museum building and Colmer's Hill. These will be on display along with older ones from the Museum's collection.

The Museum is also showing items given to the Museum by Frances Sanctuary. Mrs. Sanctuary lived in Uploders and was heavily involved in the museum from its early days. She gave many things including her bridesmaid's dress to the museum. There will also be a display of beautiful Victorian gowns recently donated to the museum.

One display for this season is a little different from the others. It is a display of artwork that has been created by Year 5 children from St. Mary's School, residents of Harbour House in West Bay, and visitors to Chancery House day centre in Bridport. The children and older people have all learnt about Dr. Roberts (the well-known Bridport physician), and produced a variety of artwork inspired by him and the theme of wellbeing. The project has been led by 3 local artists: Eileen Haste, Sarah Butterworth and Nancy Clemance.

Entry to the Museum this season is still free, and there is plenty to keep everyone entertained. This season we have a bumper book sale to raise vital funds to keep our work going. The books include many titles on local history, and other historical subjects.

Bridport Museum is open Monday-Saturday, 10am-5pm from Saturday 23rd March to Saturday 2nd November.

For more information email office@bridportmuseum.co.uk or call 01308 458703

Website address: www.bridportmuseum.co.uk.

Follow us on Facebook and Twitter @bridportmuseum



The Colmer's Hill Quilt

Gillingham Local History Society & Museum

David Lloyd, Chairman

New Year Honours

Society Member and Museum Volunteer Tony Coombs received a great Christmas present when he and his wife Maureen learnt that Tony was to receive an **MBE in the Queen's New Year's Honour List**. The award, officially announced on 29 December, was to recognise Tony's service to the community in Gillingham.

Tony spent his working career with Hudson & Martin's (now Sydenhams) starting in the Pay Office and rising to be the Manager of the Timber Department. He later became a Director until his retirement in 2002.

Most of his adult life Tony has been involved with various local organisations including the local Angling Club and Milton-on-Stour School. He served 28 years as a town councillor with 4 terms as Mayor. It was during Tony's first term as Mayor that he led a Steering Committee to form a Town Twinning link with Le Neubourg in 1977. Tony became a Freeman of the Town in 1996.

Apart from his regular help for the Museum he is currently branch secretary of the Devonshire & Dorset Regiment Association which also involves him as a fundraiser for The Rifles charity 'Care for Casualties'.

CONGRATULATIONS TONY.



Tony Coombs

New Storage Space for Museum

Sam Woodcock points out the space where the new storage area will be built - essentially an extension to the existing mezzanine storage area. The Museum has outgrown its current storage space and the proposed extension will be a valuable asset for the future.

Work by the contractors started on 7 January. It has been all 'hands to the pump' to move exhibits and displays to create space for the workmen. The Museum is now closed to the public and re-opening is expected at Easter.



Work in progress in the museum



Sam Woodcock points out the space

Portland Museum

David Carter

At Portland Museum we are very proud of the fact that we were founded over 80 years ago by birth control pioneer, Marie Stopes, so it came as somewhat of a shock to find a reference in the 'Weymouth Telegram' to the "opening of Portland Museum" fifty years earlier, on Wednesday 23rd August 1882 at the New Congregational School, Chesil, with the objective to raise funds for re-seating the Congregational Chapel.

The wonderfully descriptive and comprehensive news coverage by the local Victorian press was very different to today's lurid 'red-top' newspapers who are more interested in selling copies, than in-depth factual reporting. The report in the 'Weymouth Telegram' of the "opening of Portland Museum" listed those attending, the opening speeches and, what must have represented the bulk of the display, over 120 artefacts with the names and where significant the titles of the owners who had kindly lent them. I was almost tempted to put them into a 'Modes' database!

The displayed artefacts spanned items of local interest, including Jurassic fossils, Roman finds, 'ancient tools' and 'iron projectiles cased in lead' discovered when the Verne Citadel was built on the site of Portland's ancient hill fort, as well as 'tallow candles and ostrich eggs' from the 1877 wreck of the 'Avalanche', but also the classic eclectic mix of the Victorian collector such as a Royal Bengal tiger's skin from Rajpootani exhibited by Mrs Way that had been shot by her brother, a "French Eagle" from Waterloo, a two-edged sword taken from a Druze at the siege of St Jean d'Acre, Mr Ackerman's boots that had twice been to the Arctic regions and Queen Macoma's jewels from Kafirland. There were also a number of paintings and items of craft including items made from Portland Stone, dresses of the 17th century by Mr Wallis, draper of Fortuneswell and a large model of a yacht that had won third prize at the Dorset Industrial Exhibition of 1878. The revelation of this exhibition, four years earlier led us to yet another comprehensive report in the 'Weymouth Telegram', details of which must be the subject of a further article.

The speeches were particularly interesting and although only a précis of them was included, in the following week's edition it stated that "at the opening of Portland Museum last week several speeches were made, which we were compelled to curtail, the following is a more extended report" and there followed a virtual transcript of the actual speeches, including when applause came from those present, such that we could put now on a re-enactment of the event in our "New Museum".

Sadly one of the invitees to the opening, Prime Minister William Gladstone, was unable to attend but his son, had sent a letter expressing his father's "regret at his inability to accept the invitation, owing to the weather". Although it may seem a little presumptuous to have asked Mr Gladstone to come to the Portland Museum opening and then for him to decline with the rather dodgy excuse "owing to the weather" a little further research in the 'Weymouth Telegram' explained all. It transpired that the Prime Minister was actually visiting Her Majesty's Convict Establishment on Portland with, among others, his son Herbert Gladstone MP, on the preceding Sunday and Monday, while he "was improving the recess by taking a trip down the Channel". Further his excuse for not attending "owing to the weather" also appeared quite reasonable as he had arrived by, and was staying, on Lord Wolverton's steam yacht, the 'Palatine' presumably in the partially complete Portland Harbour.

As we do today, they could not just rely on the public coming to see the exhibition but had also to provide some entertainment so it was reported that "the evenings have been made very attractive by some music and singing" at which "Scotch and other songs were sung".

Was it a success? It was only scheduled to open for two weeks but by popular demand there was an extension for a further week and even justified the selling of 'season tickets'. During those three weeks there were between 2,000 and 3,000 visitors and after paying expenses, raised the equivalent in today's money of approximately £3,000. During the speeches Prison Governor George Clifton and Rev. TA Ottley, both hoped that "the Museum will form the germ of some permanent institution of a similar kind". Their wish was granted, although it would take a further 50 years for it to come to fruition.

Having found a 'tallow candle' from the 'Avalanche' in our collection we are now searching our accession records to see if any other objects from the 1882 Portland Museum may have been donated, 50 years later to our "New Portland Museum".



South Somerset Joseph Lewis

Pearson Exhibition Raises Profile

An exciting new exhibition is currently on display at Yeovil Town House, Union Street, Yeovil, writes Joseph Lewis. The ceremonial sword and medals reflect the glittering military career of Sir Charles Knight Pearson. Sir Charles was the son of Commander Charles Pearson, who settled in the village of Thorne Coffin, near Yeovil in 1846, after a naval career. The personal items which relate to the two generations of the family are the first objects to be displayed in the Town House in a new exhibition.

Sir Charles Knight Pearson enjoyed a significant military career with medals obtained in the Crimean War and South African Campaign. A carefully prepared exhibition panel details each medal and item and also includes a brief biography of Commander Charles Pearson and his son, Sir Charles Knight Pearson. One of the highlights is a ceremonial sword presented to Lieutenant-General Sir Charles Knight Pearson by the people of Yeovil in 1879. This specially-inscribed sword reads: 'Presented to Col. Charles Knight Pearson C. B. Oct. 6 1879 In the Town Hall, Yeovil, Somerset by Inhabitants of the Town and Neighbourhood as a mark of their Esteem and Admiration. The reverse of the blade is etched with battle honours: EKOWE Jan 23 to April 4 1879. INYAZANE Jan 22 1879.'

The service at Yeovil Town Hall was a notable occasion as the following extract attests:

"Subscriptions limited to one guinea were raised without public appeal. 40 guineas raised and a "handsome sword" obtained. The band of 16th SRV played "The Relief of Ekowe" fantasia and gallop. Colonel Pearson looked well and wore the order of Companion of the Bath. The Mayor welcomed Sir Charles back to his native county - "a distinguished soldier whom we are proud to claim as a Somersetshire man." The Mayor read a letter from Major Paget MP from Cranmore Hall, Shepton Mallet - he admires "the calm dauntless spirit which breathes throughout the soldier-like dispatches written from Ekowe."

A beautifully illuminated address on vellum was presented – the wording quoted in full and the details of the inscription on the sword were also given in full. Jocular references to the fact that Col Pearson was not a bachelor led the Mayor to say he should not terminate the meeting without recognising the fact that Mrs Pearson had been in Natal tho’ not Ekowe. Three cheers were given for Mrs Pearson and “the youngsters”. Brig.-Gen Pearson replied: “He was under a great obligation to his kind, unselfish chief Lord Chelmsford and to the gallant officers and men, Navy, Army and colonial troops (black and white) who were placed under his command.”

Mr Harbin seconded the vote of thanks. He alluded to the bravery of Col. Pearson’s father in the Peninsular War. Mr H. had been told by an old officer (an ear-witness) that “when the noble Duke saw his uncle General Pearson scale the walls of Salamanca he exclaimed “Brave Pearson! Brave Pearson!” The bells of St. John’s rang out a merry peal.”

Memorial plaques to the Pearson Family can be viewed on request inside Thorne Coffin Church.

Yeovil Town Council is working in partnership with South Somerset District Council’s Heritage Team to offer people a new opportunity to see some items of local historical interest to Yeovil. The exhibits from the Community Heritage Access Centre, can be seen from Monday to Friday between 8.30am and 4pm, except public holidays until autumn 2013. The aim is to vary the display from time to time.

The Heritage Team is based at South Somerset District Council’s Lufton Depot, Artillery Road, Lufton. The Team welcomes local historical enquiries and is available on (01935) 462855.

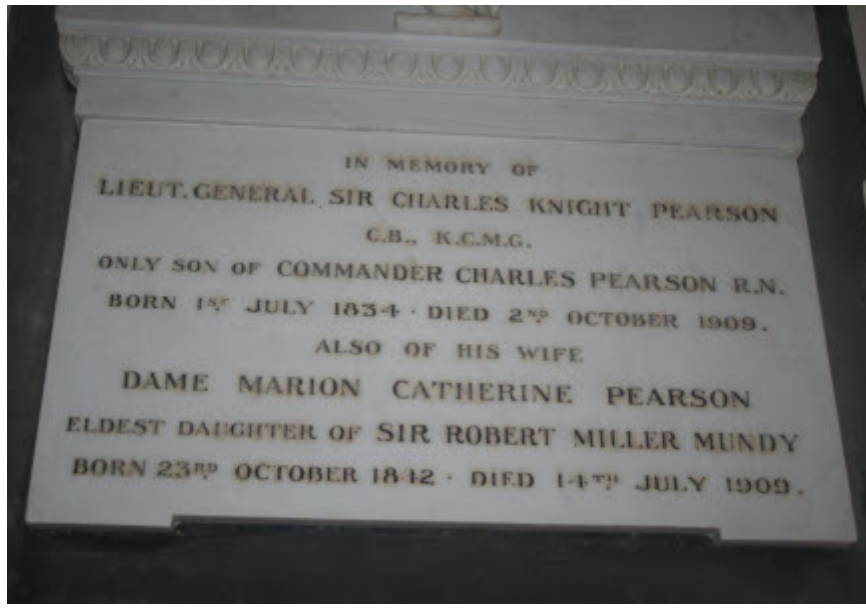


*The opening of the Pearson Exhibition
courtesy of Martin Hacker, South Somerset District Council Heritage Team*

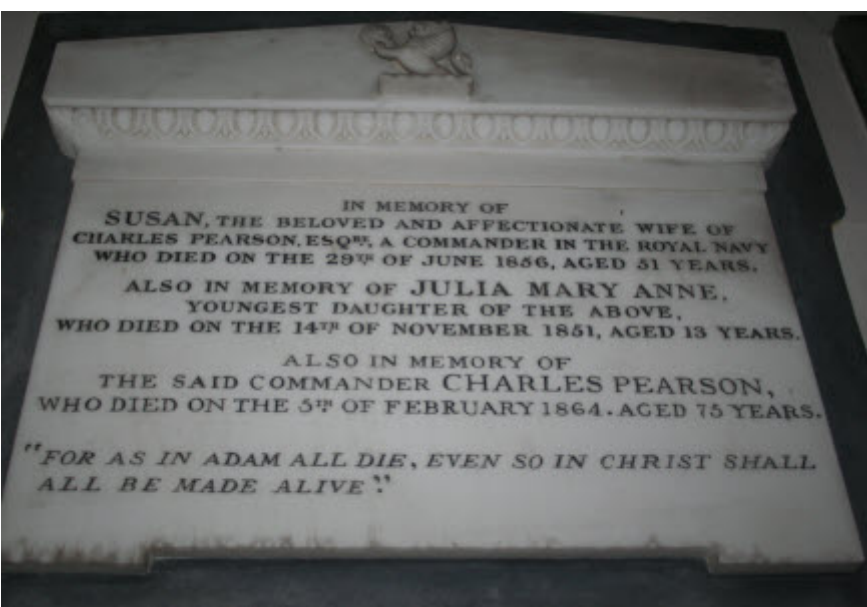


The new display of Sir Charles Knight Pearson's medals and ceremonial sword. The display also features his father's Naval dirk and scabbard.

A carefully prepared exhibition panel details each medal and item and also includes a brief biography of Commander Charles Pearson and his son, Sir Charles Knight Pearson. This was designed by Rob Loxton of Bean Creative Studios, Stoke Sub Hamdon, Somerset.



Memorial plaques to Commander Charles Pearson and his son, Sir Charles Knight Pearson in Thorne Coffin Church, near Yeovil, which can be viewed upon request.



The Priest's House Museum & Garden, Wimborne

James Webb

A new season gets underway

The Priest's House Museum & Garden reopens for its new season on Good Friday, 29 March. The new garden tearoom has recently taken delivery of a coffee machine, which was trialled during February half term. Customers were able to choose from a number of varieties of coffee, from cappuccinos to lattes and Americanos. It proved very popular with visitors and volunteers staffing the tearoom.

Preparations are well underway for two new exhibitions. 'The Games We Used to Play' is an opportunity to showcase more of the wonderful childhood collection that the museum has developed over the years. There will be chance to reminisce about playground games and the appetite for adventure outside the home, along with much loved toys. This also highlights how society's attitudes have evolved.

'Suits You Sir' will explore the changing face of menswear. Up until the 1950s a person was often judged by the clothes he wore. There were strict rules as to when, where and what to wear at any given occasion. Even during hot weather a man was expected to wear his jacket in the presence of a lady and had to politely ask if he could remove it. A person's job still dictates what can and cannot be worn. The displays will feature a gentleman's embroidered velvet waistcoat (circa 1900), an Acme tie press (to remove any unsightly creases), a three piece suit with flared trousers and a double-breasted suit made by Velvet Illusion of London (2008).

The Georgian parlour is re-imagined

The museum is working with Alison C Board, a mature Fine Art student at Arts University Bournemouth. Working alongside the curators she is bringing a new perspective to and interpretation of the Georgian parlour room setting.

Museological methods will be considered with an artist's eye, allowing the visitor to step back in time and interact more with the scene that is presented. She will draw on the museum's collections but will also take the opportunity to debate the issue of what is meant by an object's authenticity. This will encourage the visitor to see objects in a different light and consider more the purpose and function for which they were originally conceived.

This exciting project will be the museum's first chance to consult with its visitors and the local community on phase two of its redevelopment, the reinterpretation and redisplay of the house.

The installation will run from the 22 to 27 April. For more information you can follow Alison's work via <http://alisoncboard-fineart.blogspot.co.uk>.