



Athelstan Museum
Capturing the history of Malmesbury

FRIENDS OF ATHELSTAN MUSEUM Autumn Newsletter 2014

Malmesbury's Fire Engine



This photo shows the fire engine being painstakingly conserved in the store at Hullavington. Intriguingly the last time the appliance was worked on was also at Hullavington many years ago. Then it was by the RAF and their team of mechanics! We hope very soon to have this well loved object back on display in the Town Hall. The appliance, strictly speaking a pump not an engine, dates from around 1780 and was made by Samuel Phillips in Blackfriars, London. There is an article about it on our website.



Chairman's Message

Summer is slowly, ever so slowly giving way to autumn and we all are preparing for the dark, cold months of winter. Yet, the summer of 2014 has left us with some happy memories. The attendance this year was almost as good as last year and we didn't have the lace show. Instead, we had a Living History Weekend in June coupled with a wonderful exhibit on the Civil War that has continued to draw visitors up to the present time. We had the excitement of restoration of the fire appliance under the expert care of the conservators from the Conservation and Museums Advisory Service in Chippenham.

In that regard, we have to design and build the exhibit stage so that the appliance can take its place in the lobby of the Tourist Information Centre. That will be a complicated and potentially expensive endeavour. The stage design must be agreed; the text panels created; the contracts let and the construction completed. But we have waited this long and our members want it so badly that it must happen.

This was just one piece of the news given to the members at our Annual General Meeting in September. However, I do want to concentrate on another bit of news.

As you may be aware, the Museum has a lease with the Town for its premises. That lease will be up in 2021. That is seven years away, but it is not too soon to start thinking about the future, especially when the task of moving the museum is such a great one. Your council has been thinking about this issue and about the continuing



Athelstan Museum

Capturing the history of Malmesbury

need for more space to store the collection which is growing continually and about the lack of programming and administration space. How do we solve these issues? Two years ago we looked at the chapel in the Malmesbury cemetery as a possible storage and workshop facility. In the end, it was deemed to be insecure, given its isolated location and it had too many climate control problems (dampness year round and excessive heat in the summer months), so we moved on.

Earlier this year, it was suggested that we look at the former Moravian Church and Manse as a possible new site for the entire Museum. These structures had real possibilities as they would triple the amount of space for the Museum; they had good spaces for both permanent and temporary exhibits; the buildings are in central Malmesbury and they were available for purchase which would alleviate the question of being tenants and thereby subject to the whims of landlords. A great deal of work by several Council members went into investigating the potential up-sides and down-sides of the site. From our investigations it was learned that the buildings need a great deal of work to make them secure with a figure of approximately £500,000 being determined for this work. Then there is the cost of acquisition; another £400,000. Topping it off was the cost of making the buildings fit for purpose (refitting as a museum). This was estimated to be about £1.5 to £2 million. Through quite a bit of effort, it was determined that we could raise these funds from trusts, foundations and individuals. The real stumbling block could be the operating costs. Having a museum now three or four times the size of its former self would likely mean hiring professional staff and a quadrupling of many other operating costs to a total of likely £200,000 per year. Right now our operating budget is approximately £15,000 per year.

However, in the face of these figures, your council is not ready to say yes or no to the project. We need some input from you the members and from other stakeholders. Please share your thoughts, ideas and concerns with us. We need all of the guidance we can get.

I can be reached on chairman@athelstanmuseum.org.uk. I will share your thoughts with council and we will keep you advised on our thinking.

Oh yes, there is some other news. We are moving ahead with the purchase of the exhibit case for the Garsdon finds and it should be in place after the New Year. In the meantime, there have been inquiries made about the items found during the construction of the new supermarket. Under the terms of a long standing County wide agreement, all 'finds' from development work must go to the Wiltshire Museum in Devizes. Once the items are with that museum, the Athelstan Museum can apply for a loan of the items for short periods. The decision to grant the loan is at the discretion of the lender and will depend on his/her judgement as to whether or not the Museum has suitable exhibit conditions, proper security, and adequate insurance and so on. I do not think that we have ever had a loan from the Wiltshire Museum although I do know that we did make an attempt at one point. Staying with archaeology, we do have an opportunity to acquire a 'hoard' found in Milbourne and currently with the British Museum. The price for the 1500 objects has been set at £10,000. We will need external grant funding for such a purchase and your council has authorised that efforts to that end commence. We will be asking for your help (either for the purchase or for the subsequent exhibit case) so please support your Museum. In the meantime, enjoy the autumn.

Ernest Buchner, Chairman



Athelstan Museum

Capturing the history of Malmesbury

Moths ! Who'd have 'em?



Well we don't. Our collection group found them before any damage was done and a spell in the freezer soon sorted them out!

Exhibition news

Wonders of Prehistory an exhibition of Neolithic material

Did you see the article by our collection supervisor Maria Marsh on our axe head in the Jackdaw? Inspired by that, this exhibition brings out some of our stone Age material.

World War 1 – a remembrance of Malmesbury soldiers.

This will follow on from the Civil war exhibition and is scheduled for the middle of October

Malmesbury – Then and Now

The present slide show of the civil war enactment will change to this shortly. This is a series of images of Malmesbury in 1964 compared with ones taken now by Mike Lewis from the same viewpoint. They are fascinating.

Forthcoming talk

We're hearing a lot about the First World War and the details have a bizarre fascination. Whether the interest will last until 2018 remains to be seen but at the moment yes! We have arranged a talk by a knowledgeable and enthusiastic speaker on:

Life in the Trenches on the evening of **Tuesday 18th November** in the **town hall**. This of course links in with our forthcoming exhibition. Full details will be available nearer the time and tickets will be on sale in the usual way

Now you see it - now you don't.

Our drawing of the market Cross by Tom Girton is now back on display for three months before being removed to prevent damage by light. Although the museum is specially lit it is still necessary to limit the exposure.

Tom Girton was a contemporary of Turner and together they did a couple of trips round England drawing ruins and antiquities. He was a wonderful artist; tragically he died young. Turner said of him "had Tom lived, then had I starved" This was the first object that the newly formed Friends acquired – with the aid of grants of course, so it has a special place in our hearts.



Athelstan Museum

Capturing the history of Malmesbury

Archaeology walk to Whitewalls



What is the collective noun for a group of enthusiastic searchers after Roman remains – a mob by the look of them. A full group went one Sunday afternoon in August down the Foss to Whitewalls. The party was led by Melanie Pommery-Killinger, the county archaeologist. Work on a water main had unearthed some Roman finds and so this was a rare opportunity to see archaeologists in action. Our participation in the national Festival of Archaeology, as we do every year, had yielded a pleasant and instructive afternoon.

Malmesbury Castle by Tony McAleavy.

In conjunction with the Jackdaw and the Friends of the Abbey and as part of the Carnival programme we were enthralled by this talk. There is no trace of the castle today although a dig at the Bell located massive stone works, but there is a lot of documentation. It is presumed to have been at the top of Bell Lane; it was

certainly close to the west end of the Abbey – too close claimed the monks and it was a constant cause of friction.



This picture is completely hypothetical! It is a picture of Devizes castle as an archaeologist thought it perhaps might have been. The connection is that both castles were built by Roger, Bishop of Salisbury and the king's chancellor. They were part of a line of castles and were built in the early 12th century on a grand scale. Roger is reported to have rebuilt the walls of Malmesbury in stone so we presume the castle would have been incorporated in these works. The castle was held for King Stephen but the countryside around supported Matilda so it was strategically important. It was besieged 3 times during the Anarchy – the civil war between Stephen and Matilda with her son Henry – when men said God and His angels slept, but never taken, even though Malmesbury was and burnt to the ground. The last confrontation was in 1135 when Stephen came to relieve the siege. It was a dreadful winter's day with wind and driving rain; the river was flooded and separated the 2 armies. Unable to cross they exchanged insults for awhile before retiring – I presume for a little something warming! This was the last major clash in the war and soon a peace was negotiated; Stephen would rule until his death when Henry would take the throne.



Athelstan Museum

Capturing the history of Malmesbury

In the end the monks had the last word. In 1216 King John sold them the castle which they promptly demolished. We think the Abbey was still under construction so guess where the stone went!

Malmesbury Carnival



Congratulations to Janet Casseldon, Julia Bowen, Bridget Robison and Ruth Ritchie with her husband.

Our members took to the streets in the Carnival Procession so again we showed our face and participated in the town activities. Not only did we take part, we won Third Prize for our entry, Hannah Twynnoy. Very well done! We gather that the team is already planning our Carnival entry for next year.

Petticoat Lane



The museum is usually represented at Petticoat Lane run as part of the Carnival, although we missed last year. As you can see from the photo (Caroline Allington taking no chances about getting cold) we were selling various booklets and did quite well. We also recruited 6 new members – they are very welcome. Thanks to all those who manned the stall.

AGM

As you all know, having been circulated with the details, our AGM was held on Monday 8th Sept. It was well attended with around 50 members being present, who heard a full report by Ernest of the year's activities, He thanked all members of the council for all their hard work particularly over accreditation and the collection. As a result of this we have gained a very high reputation in museum circles. Our standards match those of much larger museums, we open longer than most and it is all done by volunteers. Ernest congratulated and thanked them. Chris Perrin presented his accounts clearly illustrated with PowerPoint which showed a healthy balance although we



Athelstan Museum

Capturing the history of Malmesbury

DISCOUNTS

were warned that much of that was spoken for.

* * * He asked that members made sure their subs were paid; * * *

* * * if you haven't please do it now.
* * *

The council was re-elected en bloc. The bad news is that Ernest felt for health reasons he would have to retire in a year. He will be greatly missed and it will be difficult to find someone to step into his shoes. The good news is that he will be at the helm for another twelve months. A break for refreshment was followed by a talk by Dr Terry Russell on

West Country Georgian Theatre –
Strollers and Cads.

Bath in 1668 and Bristol 10 years later were among the very first custom built theatres. Actors were called Strollers because they walked between venues. They had a very mixed reputation and we were told some of the reasons why. Sir William Berkeley from down the road featured. He did right by her – eventually! After the fourth child!

The following traders are offering discounts to members on production of their current membership cards. We are very grateful to them for their support.

Jackdaw Café
Flowers Galore
E&S Ltd, hardware shop
A4 stationers for art materials
Geddes Carpets
CH White and Son, cycle shop
Malmesbury Garden Centre
Judy Jones Gardening Services
(07973-548615)
Adeline's Farm Vegetable Boxes
(Ros Holland 07970-729899)

FOAM Contacts

Ernest Buchner Chairman
01666 829395
Chris Perrin Hon Treasurer
01666 822191
Bridget Robison Volunteers
01666 826606

Athelstan Museum
01666829258