

## Newsletter Winter 2024/2025

### Letter from Chair of the Trustees

Dear Members and Supporters

Welcome to our first newsletter of 2025, we hope you enjoyed a Happy Christmas. I am sure you will all agree that 2024 was a great year for Athelstan Museum. Thank you for your continued support in making it happen, we couldn't have achieved our success without you.

As well as an update on activities, to help us through the dark days of January, we have an outline of our events planned for the first part of the year.

With very best wishes

Sharon Nolan  
Chair of the Trustees, Athelstan Museum Malmesbury  
[trusteechair@athelstanmuseum.org.uk](mailto:trusteechair@athelstanmuseum.org.uk)

#### **Visit to Corinium Museum**

A group of Athelstan Museum volunteers accepted an invitation to the Corinium Museum, Cirencester on 28<sup>th</sup> November 2024. Here they are under the wonderful hare mosaic in the Corinium atrium.



It was interesting to hear about the running of their museum including the challenges they face and comparing those with our own. The highlights of the exhibits from different eras were described and after the discussion everyone was free to view the extensive galleries. As well as the Roman mosaics the Iron Age dog skeleton and Anglo Saxon jewellery were recommended,  
Many thanks to Guy Parfit for organising the visit with Emma Stuart from the Corinium Museum.

## Current Exhibition

Malmesbury Railway Revisited 5<sup>th</sup> November 2024 to 20<sup>th</sup> April 2025

2025 is the 200<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the birth of the modern railway. The [Railway 200](#) celebrations will feature a variety of activities and events to showcase rail's remarkable past, its role today, and its importance to a sustainable future.

Our current exhibition is a chance to revisit the history of our own railway and its impact on the town. The display boards tell the story of the Malmesbury Branch line and its stations and the tablet on the Mezzanine gives you the chance to view the film of "The last days of the Railway in Malmesbury".

Bill Reed has also loaned his models of locomotives associated with Malmesbury, the "Malmesbury Abbey" and the "Malmesbury Bunk", read all about them from Bill below.

### "Malmesbury Abbey"



When I discovered that there had been a locomotive named "Malmesbury Abbey", designed by the great engineer GJ Churchward and built in Swindon, I decided to revive the memory of it. I found a Hornby 00-scale model of "Glastonbury Abbey", no. 4061: one digit different, and with a name-plate long enough to take the change of lettering. The renumbering and renaming was carried out by The Model Centre, Whitby, and at the same time "weathering" was added to replicate the appearance of the loco in 1950 - the date indicated by the British Railways "cycling lion" logo.

Using the "panorama" setting on my phone camera I took a photograph of the surviving buildings at Swindon Works, and used this to set up a scene at a similar location to the 1950 photograph of the actual locomotive, as shown above.

### The "Malmesbury Bunk"

"Malmesbury Abbey" never came to the station here, being too heavy for a branch line. The locomotives which served the branch from its opening in 1877 were the Dean-designed 0-4-2T tank engines, and and this type, later improved by Collett, continued on the line until its closure. As there was no turntable at Malmesbury, the loco would travel out or back bunker-first - hence the nickname.



The 00-scale Dapol model, left, is numbered 1438 - only two numbers away from 1436 which is known to have served on the line. My aim was to replicate the scene captured in 1949 by EK Lockstone, with the surviving engine shed in the background, but in the display cabinet I couldn't get the perspective to work satisfactorily so I have simply included the platform and starter signal in the "off" position shown on the left, which indicates that the train is about to leave the station once the Guard waves his flag.

My thanks to Kes Smith for help with history and modelling, to Andy Binks of the Swindon Society, and to the Library and Archives of STEAM Museum. In 2024 three articles on this topic were published in the "Malmesbury Jackdaw" and I have a short audiovisual presentation available to any group interested.  
Bill Reed

### **Collections – Tarantula sign**

In August this year the museum was asked whether we were interested in acquiring the original sign for the Tarantula Coffee House for the collection.

This will be familiar to some Members from their own youth and to others from its prominent place in the Malmesbury Voices reminiscences of many of Bill Reed's interviewees.

In the 1960s it was located in the current Lallys Tea Room on the High Street.



The sign in situ in the 1960s

The coffee house was on two floors, with a jukebox upstairs and further tables and a pinball machine in the cellar. We believe that the pinball machine might still be there! It was an important meeting place for the young people of the town. The donor of the sign describes it thus "The queue to be served seemed never ending, the music was infectious and the whole atmosphere was buzzing. It was the most vibrant place."

In 2007 the original sign was bought at auction by the donor who then had the paint work and iron work carefully restored and the previous strip lighting replaced with LED.



The sign before and after restoration

We were delighted to accept the sign for the collection; it clearly has relevance to the town and, although rather large, we had a space identified in the museum from which it could be hung. It will be displayed as soon as possible and will very much help us tell the social history of the community.

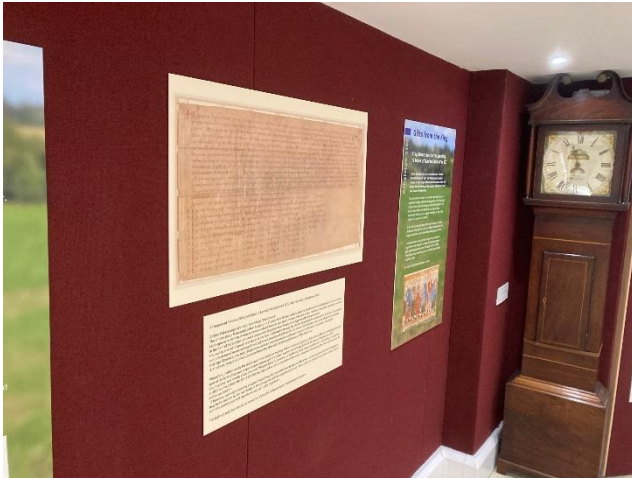
### Annual General Meeting

At the AGM on 7<sup>th</sup> October 2024 it was good to hear that the Museum has continued to remain very active and financially viable throughout the year although there was a strong message that existing key volunteers are increasingly running the risk of tiring, and finding replacements is challenging.

There was an excellent presentation by Anne Goodyer about Athelstan 1100 and the part the museum played in this event. It was entitled “An Exhibition like no other”, which everyone agreed was the case. The inside story about the exhibits was told by Tony McAleavy, Jonathan Tucker and Maria Marsh. Maria’s picture on the right gave an impression of the logistics involved.



## Legacy of the Athelstan 1100 Exhibition



You may have noticed that downstairs in the Museum we have a copy on the wall of the wonderful charter loaned by the British Library for the Athelstan 1100 exhibition. The actual manuscript dated from 939 CE and was produced in the presence of Athelstan and approved by him personally. Visitors can now have a close look without an alarm going off. Thank you to the British Library to allowing us to use the copy.

## Provenance, Authenticity and New Discoveries - A talk by Bradley Hopper, a coin specialist with Noonan's, Mayfair.

Noonan's is the specialist auction House which kindly arranged the loan of the Anglo-Saxon coins for the Athelstan 1100 exhibition. Following on from the great interest shown by visitors, Bradley kindly agreed to return and give this talk. While not knowing exactly what to expect the audience of 40 people were totally engaged by what he had to say about life in the coin trade. Illustrated by many interesting slides, we found out about the earliest coins in England, how to spot forgeries and how the provenance of a coin is researched. The evening was a great success.



Photo Terry Mocker - Bradley Hopper and Susan Mockler discuss the set-up in the Rausing.

## Athelstan Museum Reference Library

I am sure you have all admired the smart library case downstairs in the Museum. This contains our reference library which has been catalogued. The printed catalogue is now in a folder, clearly marked, in the cabinet. This is a library for reference only but why not pull up a chair when you next visit and browse our its contents.



## Malmesbury Voices

Peter Holland has been busy adding more recordings to the Voices screen on the Mezzanine. The quickest way to find these is by typing the word NEW in the SEARCH tab. You will then find Terry Soule on the Restoration of the Fire Pump; Ray Sanderson on the Charity Bed Push and 24-hour Skittles; Alan Liles on being shot at by a German fighter plane; and some previously unissued recordings of the late Pam Hall, who was at school in Malmesbury during WW2

To tie in with the Railway Exhibition we also have a number of associated voice recordings.

If you type RAILWAY in the SEARCH tab you will find recordings of people who remember the station and the branch line, as well as the tunnel which children used to play in even before the line closed!

**HOME**

**Back**

Alternatively...

Select by Category

Select by Speaker's name

**Search through all the titles and speaker's names.**

To search for items in this list touch the  box and type on the pop-up keyboard.

You can type one or more, whole or partial words, separated by spaces. Each word or partial word is searched for independently.

For example: typing "King Charles" would match items titled "King Charles opens special exhibition" and "Charles Jones was making cartwheels". (If these items existed.)

NEW Phil Bassett - Goods Trains at the Railway Station

[Tristan Forward - The Railway Tunnel](#)

[Tristan Forward - Playing around the Station Yard in the 50s](#)

NEW Ben Goodwin - Taking the Train in Malmesbury

NEW Pam Hall - Memories of the railway station

[Elizabeth Outlaw - Playing in the Railway Tunnel](#)

[Jo Price - Incident at the Railway Hotel](#)

My thanks to Peter for his technical support and to everyone who has contributed their Voice over the past nine years. There's more to come!

Bill Reed

## Education and Outreach

The children and young people side has had a quiet time for the last few months with just the occasional school or youth group visit. However, plans are being made to start what we hope will grow into a regular monthly History Activity session on Saturday mornings. Our first one will be on January 25<sup>th</sup> and will be based on Railways – to tie in with the current exhibition in the museum. Further sessions will focus on subjects such as: castles, animals, Eilmer and flight. If your grandchildren are visiting, please look out for further details and bring them along.

The main activities have been our talks at Athelstan house. These are held regularly on a wide variety of topics and volunteers from the museum are valued contributors to their programme. Visiting speakers are received enthusiastically and talks about a wide variety of topics keep the residents' interest.

Susan Mockler visited on November the 13th and gave a talk about finding Athelstan in Malmesbury; a presentation written by Anne Goodyer, for the Athelstan 1100 celebrations. The variety of slides provided visual interest while the talk about them brought a lot of memories to mind.

The afternoon concluded with a short discussion about the changing High Street. A challenge was set to name as many biscuits as possible as a Adye and Son, Family

Grocers (est. 1827) on the High Street, claimed in 1934, to provide between 80 and 90 varieties: 'an indispensable addition to the regular daily menu'.

Bill Reed presented extracts from the "Malmesbury Voices" collection to an audience of 20 residents at Athelstan House on October 2nd. It prompted memories of the old Hospital, flooding at Town Bridge, the old cinema, and shops in the High Street.



Photot: Bill listens to a comment from an audience member at Athelstan House.

Thanks to Julie Marshall for permission to use this photograph.

### **Ted Palmer, Mary Hill and Helen Lee**

It's with great sadness that we have to inform you of the death of three long standing Museum volunteers, Ted Palmer, Mary Hill and Helen Lee.

Ted Palmer had a very long association with the Museum as a regular on the desk and as an enthusiastic helper when the Museum had to move out of the Town Hall and then back again. He was a keen member who also kept a close eye on the finances by his questions to the Treasurer at every AGM! Ted was very community minded and was involved in many aspects of town life including a long association with the Malmesbury Rivers Valley Trust.

Mary Hill was also a long standing supporter and a regular volunteer, covering the desk every Monday morning with Linda Banwell, until she was well into her 90s, only stopping when COVID forced us to close. Again, very community-minded, Mary was a founding member and chaired the Malmesbury Rivers Valley Trust, selling garden pots at fairs and markets to raise money. Mary was a town councillor and served as the town's mayor in 1995. She would be regularly seen walking her beloved dogs around the town.

The Museum was a place that was very special to Helen Lee. For many years she covered the Sunday sessions and until very recently was covering regularly on Saturday afternoons. Helen was also involved with the Roman Coin Hoard, helping to identify, weigh and record the many coins. She was really excited by this project and according to her friend, neighbour and fellow volunteer, Caer Rice-Smith, she couldn't stop talking about it!

Helen was a keen artist and gardener and had a wicked sense of humour and she'll be sadly missed.

## What's On

Thank you very much to all the museum volunteers who help at events for all the hard work you have put in to help the talks taking place in the Rausing Building this year. By taking the time to ensure the chairs, tables, A/V, kitchen, bar, door, cake, tea, notices are in place helping the museum's finances considerably.

Thanks also go to Richard Searle-Barnes for organising such a willing band to help out, whether it is in the afternoons or evenings.

Hopefully you have been able to stay for the talks and enjoyed them too.

With many thanks,

The Events Team, Trustees and Museum Management Team

## We have some great talks lined up for 2025:

### Teatime Talks - Wednesdays at 2.30pm

Feb 26th Deborah Clogg - Behind the Scenes at the Museum. What, Why & Where is the Collection.

March 19th Tony McAleavy - Manuscript Treasures from Medieval Malmesbury.

April 23rd Anne Goodyer - A history of Malmesbury told by its Buildings 1170 to 2014.

May 21st Bill Reed - The Lost Language of Wiltshire. The Everyday Speech of Jackdaws and Moonrakers.

June 18th Alexia Clark - The work of the MOD War Detectives.

### Evening Events

Feb 7th Museum Quiz

May 9th Nicola Moorby - talk about JMW Turner

Tickets & further details for all Museum Events will be available from our website

<https://www.athelstanmuseum.org.uk> or in the Museum.