



Athelstan Museum
Capturing the history of Malmesbury

FRIENDS OF ATHELSTAN MUSEUM

Summer Newsletter 2014

Viking Exhibition at the British Museum

On 14th April an elite band of our members visited the Viking Exhibition at the British Museum. The trip, organised by Christine MacLachlan, as usual, went smoothly and effortlessly. It really is such an easy way to see these London Exhibitions. Thank you Christine.

Before visiting the exhibition we were given a sweeping overview of their marauding, their beliefs and their civilisation. In the 250 years from 800 AD they changed from a motley collection of small “kingdoms” whose way of life was based on brutal raids to steal slaves and plunder to a much more united nation which traded widely. The long ships are the hallmarks of the Vikings and with them they reached four continents and using the rivers infiltrated throughout Europe and beyond. Their empire and culture spread more widely than the Romans.

Fired by this lecture and armed with our new insight we tackled the exhibition. We had timed tickets so sailed straight in. The displays were magnificent; several hoards were on display along with a wealth of other material – some from the far flung corners of the world illuminating their wide trading links.

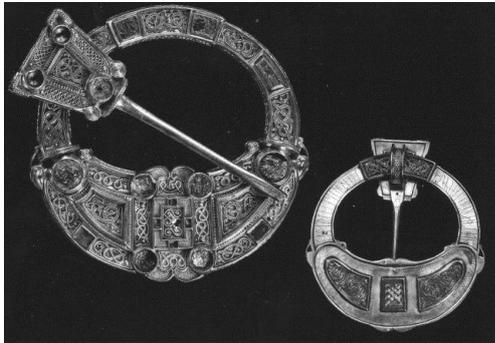


The main piece of course is the display of the remains of a long boat and long it was – over 140 feet; the biggest ever found. It was both disappointing and impressive. Disappointing because all that remains is some fragments of rotten planks which are visually not very exciting but impressive because they are attached to a stainless steel skeleton which conveyed a wonderful impression of what the boat must have been like. It stretched from one end of the gallery to the other and it took little imagination to build a hull round this, hoist a sail and people the ship with 100 warriors and it is obvious why they were feared round the world.



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After the exhibition most people had time to sample other aspects of the museum before we gathered at 4pm for a smooth return to Malmesbury.

It was a very successful trip and we had thought it would be an intriguing and popular one, yet we failed to fill the coach. Any suggestions as to why would be welcome. This was the third such trip – are members sated? Did we start too early at 7.20am? Too expensive? At £45 for transport, tea, coffee and excellent biscuits, a first rate lecture just for us as a group plus easy admission to a very popular exhibition, we'd have thought not. What ideas have you got?

CHAIRMAN'S MESSAGE

As I write this message, we are about half-way into the English spring and the weather is starting to feel more like summer. True, we are having our share of spring rains and that brings me to my first point.

The Museum is looking for a volunteer who is handy with his or her hands to build and install some sub-floors in the gift shop cabinets. From time to time and at least once during my tenure, the roof gutters on the Town Hall have overflowed and the water has

run down the walls, pooling on the floors in the cabinets. The result is that any shop stock stored on the floor is water soaked and has to be discarded. Installing a sub-floor about 1" above the existing floor would alleviate the damage to the stock and still leave sufficient room for storage. So, if you think you can help us with this, please let me know.

Another building project that will be starting soon is the installation of new lighting in the mezzanine exhibit area. We have raised £4,000 from several sources and that means that we can now move ahead in mid-May. Having good lighting should make the learning experience much more agreeable for our visitors and also help our volunteers when they are working on the mezzanine. I would like to thank Mike Johnson and Mike Elam for bringing this project along.

At this year's Town Council Annual Awards meeting, the Athelstan Museum Council was announced as the **winner of the Paul Dove Community Group of the Year Award**. It was wonderful for everyone who has worked so hard since September 2012 to be recognised in this way. I am speaking of not just the twelve members of the Council, but also the scores of volunteers who have done such a fine job of supporting and implementing your Council's decisions.

In earlier editions of this Message, I have told you about how the Museum was working towards retaining accredited status with the Arts Council of England (ACE). We should be receiving official word about whether or not our efforts have been successful in the very near future. However, in the interim since that submission in February, the Museum participated in the South West Museum



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Development Partnership/ACE *South West Museums Sustainability Pilot Programme* as one of five museums of a similar size. This required us to put together a team from the Council (myself, Mike Johnson, Bridget Robison, Chris Perrin, Maria Marsh, Sharon Nolan) and one non-councillor (Julia Bowen) to examine aspects of the Museum's sustainability health. Although much had been done in the Forward Plan already, we were pleased to be able to identify some particular areas of need in detail using the sustainability templates provided by the programme organisers. We now know that the Museum has some serious work to do in collaborating with other organisations and bodies in the town and we have some plans in the works to start meeting the challenges. We also now know that there are improvements to be had in being aware of the community's needs and expectations. And, while we were aware of the need to always be financially sustainable we identified ways to improve what we are already doing.

As a result of that effort the Museum has received a small grant of £320 to implement one aspect of the resulting plan; the purchase of a [new donation box](#). Bringing our need for visitor donations more visible to visitors should increase the amount we receive from our 14,000+ annual audience.

Life has not been all work this spring. In mid-April, a coach load of us travelled to London to see the Vikings at the British Museum. What a magnificent sight it was to see a Viking ship replicated full size in the new Salisbury Gallery accompanied by lots of Viking treasure in other galleries. I think everyone on the trip enjoyed the day and the exhibition. Our thanks go to Christine MacLachlan for once

more organising an exciting day away for our members.

Finally, there is an up-coming event that merits your active support. The Museum is one of several groups in town working feverishly on the presentation of [the Living History Weekend on June 14/15](#). There will be around 200 Civil War soldiers garrisoning the town along with lots of artisans who were required to support such a 17th century army. My request is twofold. Please enjoy the weekend's events as a spectator, but we also need lots of volunteers to help us with the presentation. We will not be asking for lots of hours or effort, but we will need about 100 people to guide the expected audience, answer questions, help with the set up and take down of exhibits around the town and so on. In mid-May we will be sending out a formal call for help but maybe mark the weekend in your calendars now.

Best regards to you all

Ernest Buchner, Chairman



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QUIZ EVENING

“The best quiz I’ve been to” said a discerning competitor at our quiz evening. This helped our funds and gave much fun. Eight teams took part; Ruth Jefferies’ team won (our Chairman’s team fared less well!). Raffle prizes were given by Shipton Mill, Fruit, Roots and Shoots, Sophie’s cheese, Malmesbury Brewery, Adeline’s Farm, which we much appreciate. This event deserves to become a regular feature.

MALMESBURY FIRE ENGINE

Those of you with long memories will recall the old Malmesbury fire engine. For many years it stood in the centre of the old museum and was a great favourite. It is one of the earliest fire engines- well- pump to be more accurate and well worth displaying. See our web site www.athelstanmuseum.org for fuller details.

When the museum moved to our present location there was not enough room to display it there so for a while it stood proudly in the public spaces of the town hall. It had to be moved and is now in storage. Now the quest is on to find a place; prominent yet safe, where it can be permanently on display. So, watch this space!

MALMESBURY COMMUNITY GROUP OF THE YEAR

We are very proud that the Athelstan Museum has been chosen this year by Malmesbury Town Council as winners of the Paul Dove Community Group award. This is given every year and the competition is fierce. It is not a competition you can enter; you have to be nominated and the decision as to the winner is made by a group of councillors. We are very appreciative of this honour not least because it indicates the respect the museum is held in by people at the centre of town affairs.

So well done, everyone, from our august chairman to the humblest member. It is your efforts that bring the exhibits to life and make the museum the vibrant centre it is.

LEAFLET DROP

We are always keen to obtain more members of FOAM and to publicise the museum. Our members are great ambassadors but in a drive to increase our profile our membership secretary, Sharon Nolan, has organised a leaflet drop to every house in Malmesbury. It is a mammoth task and can’t be done overnight. Some will have already had the pamphlet, for others it is a treat in store.



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COLLECTION

The current exhibit is the Civic Trust: Fifty Years in Malmesbury. The exhibit is an overview of the founding of the society in 1963, and of some of its good works in the town. Without the Civic Trust in the town over these past 50 years helping to conserve historic sites, Malmesbury would look quite different. The exhibit also includes a very popular slide show of pictures taken by Graham Carey of Malmesbury in 1964. If you haven't seen this yet come along, pull up a chair and settle down comfortably. There are only 143 pictures to see.

Once the lighting work has been done there will be an exhibition on the Civil War to link with the re-enactment. This will be followed by an exhibition featuring World War I to coincide with the national events to mark the start of that war 100 years ago.

EVENTS

CIVIL WAR WEEKEND 14th and 15th JUNE

As announced in the Chairman's letter this is expected to be great fun as well as educational. We are playing our part in the organization and obtaining funding and we also need volunteers on the day – meet and greet, programme selling, you know the kind of thing so please, please if you can spare some time that weekend to help for a while please email your time and availability to the museum at info@athelstanmuseum.org This is going to be a major event and we want it to go well and how better to make that happen than by being on parade. (Dressing up not compulsory)

WALK TO WHITE WALLS BY THE FOSSE

Sunday 13th July 2.00pm Stroll down the Fosse with Melanie Pomeroy Kellinger who is the Wiltshire Archaeology Officer. It's an easy walk and there is a lot of evidence of the Roman presence. This is our contribution to British Archaeology fortnight this year.

Meet on the Foss just south of where it crosses the B4040 (to the east side of the old prisoner of war camp)

Price FREE but donations welcome!

MALMESBURY CASTLE

In August Tony MacAleavy is to give a talk on Malmesbury Castle. This event is being organised by the Carnival and the Jackdaw so details from them. It promises to be very interesting. We have had the pleasure of hearing Tony twice before and have been both entertained and educated.



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GARSDEN SUMMER PARTY

Garsdon Manor Garden Party

Sunday 22nd June 3.00 - 6.00pm

This is advance notice so you can reserve the date. Members and their guests will receive invitations to this event which is in aid of the Malmesbury Unearthed Exhibition which will be in the museum. Tickets are £10 and will be available in response to the invitation or from the museum.

Parking will be available at Garsdon House which is opposite the church.

We shall gather in the church; an interesting building in its own right but also houses a memorial to the Washington family who once owned Garsdon Manor which is where we shall move on to (400yd walk) via the site where the material for the exhibition was discovered. This has been donated by Mr and Mrs Gifford whose land it is and by Mr Cuss who was the one who found it and he will be demonstrating his technique.

Tea with summer refreshments will be on Garsdon Manor lawn.

Roger Scruton, who has written many books and is very interested in Garsdon, will give a talk on Garsdon around 5.15pm.

This event has been very kindly sponsored by Blount and Maslin, the local estate agents.

BBC HISTORY WEEKEND

Thursday 16TH to Sunday 19th
October 2014

We don't actually run this but we do know how much many of our members enjoyed it last year. This year it is back –bigger and better than ever. Details from the website www.historyweekend.com

MEMBERSHIP CARD DISCOUNTS

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

E and S, High Street

Flowers Galore, High Street

Jackdaw Café in the Town Hall

Judy Jones Gardening Services 07973548615

Malmesbury Garden Centre

C H White, 51 High Street

FOAM Contacts

Ernest Buchner Chairman 01666 829395

Chris Perrin Hon Treasurer 01666 822191

Bridget Robison Volunteers 01666 826606