



FRIENDS OF ATHELSTAN MUSEUM

Newsletter Autumn 2015

The summer has been a very busy time for your committee, so although we have been in touch with you on many occasions there has been no proper newsletter - apologies for that - please enjoy this one.

AGM

Sue Poole, last year's mayor and a great supporter of the museum, officially 'opened' the fire engine. It has been recently restored and is now on display in the window of the information centre, proudly standing on its new plinth. Details about the fire engine are on our website: www.athelstanmuseum.org.uk

Then came the business part of the meeting. After the Chair's report and the Treasurer's report were the elections:

Members of Council

Sharon Nolan - Chair,
Ruth Ritchie - Treasurer,
Caroline Allington - Collection Conservator,
Janet Casselden - Education and Learning,
Catherine Doody - Hospitality,
Roger Griffin Publications and Publicity,
David Heiland - IT,
Mike Johnson,
Robert MacLachlan,
Maria Marsh - Collections and Exhibits,
Bridget Robison - Volunteer Coordinator,
Sophie Scruton - Events and Fund Raising,
Angela Sykes - Recording Secretary,
Susann Winlow - Membership Secretary,
Tim Burge (ex office and Museum Mentor).

David and Sue are new members and Ruth is now elected rather than co-opted. Welcome aboard.

Chris Perrin has resigned as Treasurer after several years' valiant service including two of the labours of Hercules - the finances for the Lottery bid and correlating the donations and pledges for the appeal for the Moravian Church. A very big thank you to him. Thanks are due also to Barry Dent who has handed over stock control to David Heiland after wrestling with the vagaries of our volunteers for years.

Salisbury Trip

We had a warm, bright autumn morning for the FOAM group visit to Salisbury. We travelled in a yellow Andrew James coach to Salisbury, and the wiggly route made us all feel glad not to be driving. We walked through the Medieval Arch to enter the Cathedral Close. What a contrast between the narrow medieval street, where houses seem to close in above our heads, and the huge elegant space around the cathedral with infinite blue sky and fluffy clouds for the spire to ascend into.

We assembled outside Salisbury Museum and our Guide greeted us. He was well aware of connections we all share with St Aldhelm and the Bishopric of Sherborne and explained them as we walked through the museum which is a former residence of the Bishop of Sherborne. Over coffee and cake he explained what we could expect to find in the exhibition: 'Turner's Wessex



Athelstan Museum

Capturing the history of Malmesbury

'Architecture and Ambition' - pictures that have not been together since the 19th Century when private collections were disbanded. We went on to see pictures of Salisbury Cathedral and other town views. An atmospheric film showed us views of the town from the position Turner painted them. Mike Lewis, who has attempted to photograph Malmesbury from the position Turner drew, noticed that the film-makers encountered the same problem as he did: Turner, did not keep his head still and paint what was in front of him, but included details from all around him. The exhibition also had rooms devoted to Portsmouth, Stourhead and Fonthill Abbey and pictures of Stonehenge including a study by Thomas Girtin (an artist who influenced Turner and whose drawing of the Market Cross is in the Athelstan collection). A little of Turner's financial acumen is revealed in his expenses claim for his trip to Malmesbury in the late 1790s. His patron, Sir Richard Hoare of Stourhead, refused to pay one part of the claim!



In the cloisters of Salisbury Cathedral

Over lunch a few of us peeked into the new archaeological gallery that had just

been opened at Salisbury. It is magnificent and well worth a visit. Each display seems to be a mini-museum about the period being shown and there are plenty of high quality artefacts. Next we toured the Cathedral and were taken round by an experienced guide. We heard how James Wyatt (an architect who also featured in the Turner exhibition) altered the Cathedral to make it lighter in the nave. Stained glass was replaced with clear glass, coloured ceilings were whitewashed. Our guide did not approve! On the other hand, the light was at times lovely especially reflecting off the new Font installed in 2008 by William Pye.

Finally we entered the Chapter House where there is a special 800 year anniversary display of the Salisbury copy of Magna Carta, one of only four copies. It is in excellent condition and a very workmanlike document - ink on sheepskin. Each clause has been written successively across the sheet without breaks; no decoration. We all left feeling that the chance to see 'the real thing' was something worth doing in life, and were glad we took the opportunity.

Coin Hoard Open Day

The museum held an open day at Malmesbury Library on Saturday, 19th September to showcase some of the coins in the Malmesbury Coin Hoard. It was well attended by over 50 visitors. It was very kind of the library to let us use their room and interesting to talk with people who weren't expecting to see us there. The volunteers enjoyed showing the coins so look out for another day in the new year.

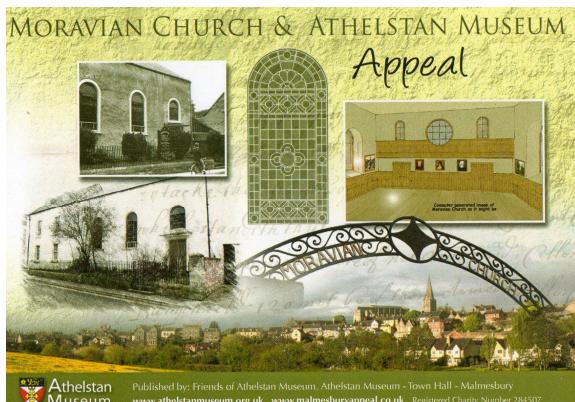


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Moravian Appeal

A real roller-coaster of an experience; we tried to keep people informed as our hopes rose and fell. Just as we were in a position to make a bid for the Church a developer stepped in and offered the full price. He now owns it but has made no attempt to do anything with it. The wonderful thing was the enormous amount of encouragement and backing we received; FOAM has a good reputation. Thank you for your support.



Portable Antiquities Exhibition

This enlightening exhibition over the summer, part of the Malmesbury Unearthed grant by the Art Fund, gave a terrific introduction to the world of metal detecting and probably inspired a few budding metal detectorists.

Malmesbury Unearthed

The new permanent display of metal detecting finds from Garsdon and the Malmesbury area has proved to be spectacularly popular with visitors. If you haven't seen it yet, make sure you look in the drawers as well. We do find we have to polish the glass case an awful lot though!

Bronze Age Spearhead Loan

There is a wonderful locally-found Bronze Age spearhead on loan to the

museum in the Malmesbury Unearthed display case. It still retains wood inside and you can still see the designs in the metal. For a 3500 year old hand-made artefact it is in remarkably good condition.

Late Night Shopping

As usual the museum will be open for late night shopping on Friday 4th December and we hope we shall be welcoming as many of you as possible. Our museum shop has had a make-over and now stocks a lot more items; it's ideal for unusual presents for all ages which are interesting but don't cost the earth.

Wiltshire At War - The Call to Arms

3rd Oct - 1st Nov

Using letters and archives this exhibition tells the stories of men in Wiltshire called to arms in the early months of World War I. It is the first exhibition of Wiltshire County's multi-year remembrance of WW1. It includes information panels and an interactive video display of stories about the war. Its development was supported by Athelstan Museum.

Wiltshire's Story in 100 Objects

12th Oct - 13th Dec

This fascinating exhibition tells the history of Wiltshire in 100 objects. It is the result of a collaboration between the museums of Wiltshire, and Athelstan Museum is privileged to be one of the few museums in the county to host this exciting display. The objects range from the stunning Amesbury Archer's gold hair braids, an 1870's policeman's helmet, to a Linolite lamp made in Malmesbury and everything in between. It is truly something not to be missed.



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Carnival

Again we entered the Carnival procession with a large and motley collection of witches. This mobile coven was larger than last year and was enhanced by the presence of some of the people from the Civil War re-enactment last year who came specially to join in. Sue Poole worked valiantly on the costumes with her own kind of magic and, of course, it was inspired by the book reviewed below.

Witches

Tony McAleavy, a very knowledgeable local historian who has spoken to us several times, has just published a book *The Witches of 17th Century Malmesbury*. Fourteen women, mostly elderly, were accused and eventually two were hung! Tony has very kindly donated all profits to the Athelstan Museum so if you buy a book you are doing us a favour as well as yourself! Copies are available in the museum. He also spoke in the Abbey at the recent BBC History Magazine's History Weekend. He gave a wonderful lecture on Malmesbury history.

Sharon Nolan
Ruth Ritchie
Brigid Robison
Athelstan Museum

FOAM Contacts

Chair	01666 822388
Hon Treasurer	01666 825901
Volunteers	01666 826606
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Volunteers

There are so many ways you can help the museum. The obvious one is taking your turn on the front desk; many people start with this and then gradually become more involved, but there are many other opportunities. Education is one area where experienced hands are always welcome. Contact Bridget Robison, or if specially interested in education, Janet Casselden, through the museum.

DISCOUNTS

The following traders are offering 10% discount to members on production of their membership cards. We are very grateful to them for their support.

Jackdaw Café in the Town Hall

Flowers Galore, High Street

E&S Ltd, hardware shop, High Street

Hyams Autos on servicing and repairs,
High Street/Cross Hayes

A4 stationers for art materials,
High Street

CH White and Son, cycle shop,
High Street

Malmesbury Garden Centre

Judy Jones Gardening Services
(07973-548615)

Adeline's Farm Vegetable Boxes
(Ros Holland 07970 729899)