

History News Archive 2006 - 2007

The *Saffron Walden Historical Journal* carries a number of shorter items as 'History News' regarding history-related events in the locality, usually at the end of the journal, but sometimes on other pages. Some of these later expand into longer articles. A selection of these items reproduced below reflects the wide range of history activities in and around Saffron Walden. Some of the original wording has been lightly edited to update it. Only a few of the original illustrations are included, where possible in colour. The date of the issue containing the item is given in brackets.

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HISTORY OPEN DAY: A never-ending stream of visitors enjoyed the History Open Day held on 24 January 2006 in Saffron Walden Town Hall to celebrate the tenth anniversary of the ERO Archive Access Point in Saffron Walden. Local History Recorders and groups, as well as the ERO archivists, put on displays and gave advice. The event was a huge success. (No 11: Spring 2006) *Photographs ©Gordon Ridgewell.*



LIBRARY CLOSURE: The closure of Saffron Walden Library for total refurbishment for a period of at least 10 months from autumn 2006 will

affect those engaged in historical research projects, for which the Town Library resources may be vital. The Uttlesford Local History Recorders are pressing Essex Libraries to ensure the fullest possible access to study materials during the closure period, if necessary by appointment at another location. They are urging access to be maintained not only to the local history items, but also to the Victorian Studies collection and the antiquarian material. At the time of going to press, no temporary accommodation has yet been found for the library. (No 11: Spring 2006)

CIVIL WAR PLAQUE : The suggestion by Stan Newens, in an article in the last issue of the *Saffron Walden Historical Journal*, that a Civil War plaque be erected in the town, has met with a favourable response locally. Saffron Walden Town Council agreed to discuss the possibility of commemorating the fact that the Parliamentary Army was stationed in Saffron Walden in 1647, and that important discussions about democracy took place in the parish church. (No 11: Spring 2006)

FIELD NAMES SEMINAR: The Friends' Meeting House in Saffron Walden was the venue for the 2005 annual seminar of the Essex Place Names Project. The presentations included a study of the Littlebury field names, given by Gillian Williamson and Lizzie Sanders, and a talk on South Cambs place-names by Dr Sue Oosthuizen. (No 11: Spring 2006)

CLAVERING CASTLE: The geophysics and earthwork surveys of Clavering Castle have been in progress since last summer and are already producing some interesting results. On the Dam meadow adjoining the castle, there were no indications of buildings but the lines of early boundaries could be detected. The earthwork survey has just concluded. On the castle platform itself, geophysics has shown the lines of possible large rectangular building and a smaller circular feature. Interpretation awaits the joining together of the two types of survey by Essex archaeologists, but the project, funded by the Local Heritage Initiative, is proving well worthwhile. (No 11: Spring 2006)

HERITAGE SAMPFORD: One inspiration for the Clavering survey was the mammoth Project Sampford, which continues to turn up a remarkable collection of objects during field-walking. Well over 150 fields have been recorded since the project began over three years ago. Many of the searches prove negative, but two more Roman sites have been located.

Among recent finds was a rare tang of a Bronze Age dagger. A major presentation of the project is planned for this year. (No 11: Spring 2006)

TREASURE IN THE FIELDS: Among small finds acquired by Saffron Walden Museum recently are a silver badge of St George, found at Takeley; a 17th century silver button from the Ashdon area and another 17th century find from Clavering. This is a silver pin from a woman's head-dress dateable to 1610-25, a fashion which spread from Holland to England. (No 11: Spring 2006)

HERITAGE SAMPFORD concluded its mammoth task completed in July. An illustrated and comprehensive report will be published in spring next year and a final event to coincide with its publication. The project has laid the foundation for further archaeology in the area now being planned. Over the four-year project some astonishing statistics were produced: 225 supporters and participants, 183 fields searched, 229 fieldwalking and processing sessions, 752 volunteer days and 28 publications. What a huge achievement! (No 12: Autumn 2006)

HERITAGE AWARD: Rosemary Nash, a member of the Project Castle team at Clavering, was awarded the East of England Regional Heritage Star Award, in recognition of her exceptional commitment to the project. The award was presented at a special event in the Tower of London in July, and the group also receives a monetary reward towards the project. (No 12: Autumn 2006)

SAFFRON WALDEN CASTLE will be coming under scrutiny in the future. It is one of the monuments on the 'at risk' alert in the listed buildings schedule, and a feasibility study is to be undertaken into the best means of preserving and promoting it. At a meeting in the spring the possibilities were discussed by representatives of Saffron Walden Museum, English Heritage and Uttlesford District Council. The curator, Carolyn Wingfield, would be interested to hear of any suggestions from local historians regarding the Castle site. (No 12: Autumn 2006)

SAFFRON WALDEN MUSEUM: In June the Museum was featured on the Radio 4 programme, 'Making History' including interviews with staff, who

discussed some of the treasures which are housed There. The theme of the programme item was the crisis in storage space which many museums are facing as collections continue to accumulate. Saffron Walden, for instance, has to store the huge collection of artefacts made during Stansted Airport excavations. One view, put forward on the programme by the Museum of London, was that museum storage should be organised on a regional basis in partnership with other local museums in East Anglia. (No 12: Autumn 2006)

THE POUND: The Saffron Walden Pound is being restored by Saffron Walden Town Council. Formerly derelict and full of rubbish, it has been cleaned out and paved, and a plaque recording its history is to be erected. The pound, which is the only one surviving in NW Essex, was formerly used by the manorial pinder to impound stray animals. (No 12: Autumn 2006)

RUTH DATABASE: A very successful launch of the new Uttlesford Local History Recorders database took place on 11 November 2006 at the Council Chamber in London Road. The event was attended by about 90 Local History Recorders and other historians who watched a demonstration of the new resource by its designer, Rosemarie Gant and its instigator Michael Southgate. The chairman of the Uttlesford Local History Recorders, Jacqueline Cooper explained how the database came about and the Manuden Recorder, Fiona Bengtsen provided a celebratory cake. After the launch, there was a chance for delegates to try RUTH for themselves on laptops. IT arrangements were in the hands of Adrian Webb, Michael Frost and Gaia Technology who designed the online version of the database. The database is known as 'RUTH' which stands for 'Recording Uttlesford History' and it is aimed at providing a computerised catalogue of all the local history collections held in villages and smaller repositories in the towns. The database is still in its early days but will steadily grow as material is inputted by the Recorders. About 35 people have been given a CD of the program, and the data is already starting to come in from a number of places, including Radwinter, Clavering, Newport and the Chesterfords. As its records grow, RUTH will become a searchable resource for the whole of NW Essex. In conclusion, the chairman quoted from a 17th century writer on the importance of recording the present as well as the past, the aim of the ULHR: (No 13: Spring 2007)

WALDEN 1647: a week of events Tuesday 14 -20 May 2007... This May the debates will be re-enacted in the church, as part of a week of events to mark the 360th anniversary of Saffron Walden's part in the birth of democracy. The programme of events includes 17th Century Poetry readings, Day School, a costumed presentation, a specially commissioned play, parade & street theatre with stocks by The Sealed Knot, 17th Century Puppet Show, 'Living History' tented encampment and displays of social skills, Demonstration of Arms, 17th Century Dance demonstrations, Drill on the Common by The Sealed Knot. Skirmish on the Common - re-enactment by The Sealed Knot. There will also be a revised and expanded edition of Martyn Everett's pamphlet: *Saffron Walden and the English Civil War...* A facsimile edition of five important pamphlets from the period is being produced... (No 13: Spring 2007)



Walden 1647 Civil War events by the Sealed Knot, organised by the Saffron Walden Initiative group. Officers of the Army in Saffron Walden Church, where the 1647 debates took place. They are, left to right, Oliver Cromwell (Keith Phillips), Sir Philip Skippon (Alan McClean) and Henry Ireton (Mark Armstead). Photograph ©Gordon Ridgewell.

TOWN TRAIL: A public try-out of the new Saffron Walden Town Trail was a huge success on Sunday 18 February 2007, with 365 people accepting the challenge to take a leaflet and try the one-hour history trail, returning to the tourist office afterwards to give their comments. A total of 72 questionnaires were returned which will be very helpful in planning the details of the trail. The Town Trail, which is being organised by the Saffron Walden Initiative and Uttlesford District Council, will be launched in June 2007. A great deal of thought has gone into designing the trail, which will be marked with plaques set at ground level. The organising

committee had a hard job choosing the best locations to install the plaques, but the final choice covered ten landmarks: Market Square, Old Sun Inn, Museum & Castle, Bridge End Gardens, the Eight Bells pub, Youth Hostel & The Close, St Mary's Church, the Cross Keys pub and the Market rows. As well as the plaques, the plans included large coloured maps at strategic points. Those taking part in the planning of the trail have included Uttlesford District Council, Tourism Officer, the Blue Badge Guides, the Fry Art Gallery, Saffron Walden Town Council, Saffron Walden Library. The photographs are being done by Gordon Ridgewell and the drawings by Megan Ridgewell. The design of the map is by Tanner Design. The co-ordinator of the project is Sarah Seward, Market Towns Project Officer. The trail is part of a wider scheme to redesign Market Square, making part of it pedestrianised, to light up the central fountain and provide seating and cycle racks. There will also be new signage throughout the town with finger-posts directing visitors to the landmarks on the trail, more litter bins and the removal of unnecessary street furniture. The complete realisation of the project is dependent on grants, but the trail has already received funding. (No 13: Spring 2007)

ARCHAEOLOGICAL SYMPOSIUM: The annual Archaeological Symposium organised by the Essex Congress was held on 4 November 2006 at Saffron Walden, with support from the Saffron Walden Historical Society and the Museum. Lecture subjects included the Hadstock project, Frogs Hall, Copped Hall, the Sampfords Project, Project Castle at Clavering and recent archaeology at Great Chesterford and Saffron Walden. Essex archaeologist Maria Medlycott explained how successful a geophysics survey had proved as a way of discovering the plan of the fourth century Roman town at Chesterford (see *SWHJ* No 5). There has also been excavation, finds including a deep pit which produced 81 sacks of animal bones but not from cookery – they were sacrifices in a pagan temple. The temple was later abandoned, perhaps through the rise of Christianity. The dig had also uncovered some later graves, possibly indicating a community of Romano-British mixing with new Saxon settlers. Manager of the Field Archaeology Unit at Essex, Mark Atkinson revealed the new discoveries at Saffron Walden from recent work. These included digs at 63 Castle Street, at Castle Court and in the yard of the former Methodist chapel on Common Hill, as well as excavations at Elm Grove (see *SWHJ* No 7). In Castle Street evidence was found of the outer bailey and town ditch of medieval Walden, and at the old Methodist chapel yard they found signs of the inner bailey ditch for the first time. The Castle Court excavation was a rare opportunity but there were no finds except one sherd of Roman greyware. Archaeology in Saffron Walden is always fun, he concluded, as you never know what you might find! (No 13: Spring 2007)

NEWPORT LOCAL HISTORY GROUP has had a very successful first year, it was reported at their AGM. Projects have included participation in the Essex Place Names survey and sorting out parish archives. Considerable discussion took place about where to store the Newport Bygones collection, but this remains unresolved. The Society has a monthly programme of lectures lined up, including talks about Nonconformity in NW Essex on 27 September, Quendon Hall on 25 October and local landscape on 22 November. (No 13: Spring 2007)



Left: Historian James Griffin explains the history of Saffron Walden Methodist Church to participants in an ERO Nonconformism History Walk in July 2007. The tour also took in Baptist, United Reformed, Quaker and Gold Street chapel buildings in the town. *Photograph (c) Jacqueline Cooper.* (No 14: Autumn 2007)

Centre: Chairman of the Town Library Committee, Bruce Munro looking at one of the Kings College Archives during the Town Library Society's visit there in July 2007. A large group of members also visited the Scott Polar Institute. *Photograph (c) Martyn Everett.* (No 14: Autumn 2007)

Right: Historian Tom Doig examines a Victorian photo album after a talk about dating old photographs, given at the 2007 AGM of the Uttlesford Local History Recorders, held at Manuden in July 2007. Also pictured (left) is Michael Southgate, Radwinter Recorder. *Photograph (c) Jacqueline Cooper.* (No 14: Autumn 2007)

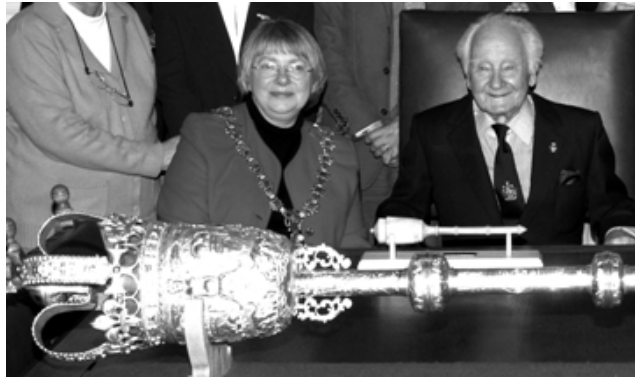
HADSTOCK PROJECT: The Hadstock Project was awarded over £10,000 through LHI and managed to get 85 adults and 30 children helping with their archaeological excavation in fields near the church in 2005, uncovering almost 100 sherds of Roman pottery. The project also found evidence of Roman fields, a trackway and signs of Saxon and Medieval occupation. An interpretation board showing the results of the project is being set up nearby so that visitors can read about the project. (No 14: Autumn 2007)

HERITAGE SAMPFORD: The Sampfords Project ran from 2002-6 and attracted total grants amounting to £40,000 to carry out a comprehensive fieldwalking study of the entire parish starting with Shillingstone, a known prehistoric and Roman site. They then spread out to all 204 fields – a massive undertaking by hundreds of volunteers, which resulted in thousands of finds and the discovery of a Neolithic farm, a Roman villa numerous Iron Age and Roman sites, medieval moats and much else including the probably prehistoric crossing of the River Pant. The final outcome is a beautifully-produced, fully-illustrated guide to the project, a great credit to all concerned. (No 14: Autumn 2007)

CLAVERING CASTLE: Now in its final stages is LHI-funded Project Castle at Clavering where the geophysical and earthwork surveys of four areas relating to Clavering Castle have been completed by volunteers from the Clavering Landscape History Group. Since this is a Scheduled Ancient Monument, English Heritage will not allow excavation, so a reconstruction of the castle will not be possible, but the results show outlines of buildings, and surface pottery confirms medieval occupation. Adjoining meadows show evidence of fishing lakes, lost field boundaries and mysterious humps and hollows. The project outcomes by next spring include a CD, interpretation board and a local history exhibition in April. In addition the group has organised a medieval re-enactment, a dowsing day, talks and tours, a new kissing gate to improve access to the Castle and is planning to provide an information board on village history. (No 14: Autumn 2007)

SAFFRON WALDEN MUSEUM: It was reported at the AGM that the Museum has recently been awarded Accreditation status in recognition of its high standards. During the year 2006-7 visitor numbers were up to 22,484, many of them schoolchildren – there were 132 school sessions, 57 Museum events, 15 outreach events and 325 enquiries. New acquisitions include RAB Butler's bowler hat. (No 14: Autumn 2007)

MACE BEARER: It was something of a landmark when Cherry Vanoli retired as Saffron Walden Mace Bearer, for he had been in the role for 45 years. His duties included work on Christmas Day and at official functions, as well as accompanying the mayor on visits. The 14.5 lb mace was given to the town by James II in 1685 – it is one of the oldest maces in the country and Mr Vanoli carried it for over 30 mayors. (No 14: Autumn 2007)



ESSEX RECORD OFFICE: The Archive Access Point, operated by Essex Record Office, will be moving in October out of the Town Hall, where it has been housed for the past decade or so, and into the newly-refurbished Library. It will be sited on the first floor opposite the top of the stairs. The number of fiche/film machines will be reduced as there is less space, but will be available all week. For those needing assistance from ERO staff, the office will continue to be staffed only on Tuesdays, Fridays and Saturday mornings. An open day is planned for the ERO facility at the end of October. (No 14: Autumn 2007)