

History News Archive 2010 - 2011

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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CONSERVING THE TOWN ARCHIVES: The culmination of a ten-year project to catalogue and conserve the Saffron Walden Town Council Archives was the subject of a special visit to the Essex Record Office in Chelmsford by a contingent of town councillors, historians, librarians and others in February 2010. It was in autumn 1999 that consultant archivist Kate Thompson started work cataloguing the archives in the town hall, assisted by volunteers. Three years later, some 6,000 items had been catalogued with ERO references and re-packaged in archival materials. After completion in 2003, the agreement between the ERO and the Town Council was that the material would gradually be transferred and digitised. However, deteriorating environmental conditions in the basement storage room persuaded the council to send the whole of the archive to the ERO earlier this year. Conservator Keith Dean explained the conservation work to the visitors, and Archivist Chris Lambert showed where they are being stored and gradually scanned for digitising on the SEAX database. (No 20: August 2010)

WICKEN BONHUNT HISTORY EXHIBITION: The small parish of Wicken Bonhunt will be celebrating history in a big way with 10,000 years of history in a 'Mesolithic to Modern' exhibition on Saturday and Sunday 8-9 May. A Middle-Saxon settlement at Bonhunt was discovered by local archaeologist Bari Hooper in the 1960s, and excavated when the M11 Motorway was under construction. Forty years of research allows us a clear and comprehensive look at the daily lives of our distant ancestors. Since the exhibition is being staged at Bonhunt Lodge, visitors can also walk around the ancient chapel of St. Helen and a remarkable historic landscape. Other displays will feature the history of Wicken House, local farms, both World Wars and family history – all sorts of material never seen before will be on view, with numerous old photographs. Newport History Group are bringing displays on Shortgrove and Quendon Hall, while Saffron Walden Museum, the Essex Record Office, the Recorders of Uttlesford History, the Saffron Searchers, the ECC Heritage department and the Essex Society for Archaeology are all contributing displays. Moreover, the whole event is completely free to visitors. At the same time there will be historical tours of St Margaret's Church (The Wicken Centre), and the annual St Helen's Chapel service will take place on the Sunday morning. The exhibition is the first event for the newly-formed Wicken Bonhunt Local History Society. (No 19: Spring 2010)

DEBDEN HISTORY EXHIBITION: Meanwhile another new organisation, the Debden Local History Recorders, played a large part in a history exhibition held at Debden Church in December 2009. As well as displays of village history and old photographs, there were special tours of the



church crypt to see the newly-identified ancient coffins therein. Much interest was aroused by the discovery of a 19th century village recipe book and a competition to produce a Scripture Cake. As often happens at these exhibitions, one happy result was the addition of new material to the local archives. (No 19: Spring 2010)

Archive Assistant, Zofia Everett with Newport historian Antony Tuck, at the Open Day held to celebrate the 15th anniversary of Archive Access. Photograph ©Gordon Ridgewell.



ERO ARCHIVE ACCESS POINT: On Tuesday 15 February 2011 the ERO Archive Access Point in Saffron Walden celebrated its 15th Anniversary, with an open day attended by many local historians. The office was opened in January 1996 in response to prolonged lobbying from local organisations, historical groups and individual historians. Thanks to the support and generosity of Saffron Walden Town Council, the Access Point occupied two tiny rooms at the top of the Town Hall for the first ten years of its life. But the entry via steep entrance steps and the climb up three flights of stairs, was not ideal, and in October 2007

refurbishment of the Corn Exchange created space for the Access Point on the first floor of the Library. The first visitor to the Access Point in 1996 was Glenn Miller, curator of the remarkable museum in Ashdon, who arrived while the office was still being set up. He obviously brought good luck with him as 15 years later the Access Point continues to generate interest and enthusiasm. Easily accessible historical material, together with the built heritage of north-west Essex, fostered interest in local history on an unprecedented scale, so that the office deals with over 1,000 visitors a year, as well as telephone, postal and email enquiries. Most visitors come from north-west Essex and adjacent counties, but some come from Europe, North America, Australia, New Zealand and even China. Many of the first users of the Archive Access Point in 1996 continue their association with the office to this day... Supported by staff from the Essex Record Office, the Access Point organises exhibitions, training sessions and talks to local organisations. The Access Point promotes oral history, training people how to use the equipment, copying the recordings and forwarding them to the Essex Sound Archive in Chelmsford. (No 21: Spring 2011)



LOOKING FOR THE MANOR HOUSE: The need for a new drainage system for Castle Hill Tennis Club in Saffron Walden provided an opportunity for archaeologists from Essex County Council to investigate what lay underneath. In October 2010 they stripped off the topsoil and excavated layers, revealing a linear

foundation with a squared end (see photo above, which appeared to be part of medieval building. They also found stone, tile and sherds in the trench. The site is of interest since the precise location of the manor house is not known – could this be part of it? Nearby, they uncovered a layer of flints which were probably foundations for the 14th century curtain wall. Another investigation, in 2009 down the bank at the side of the Museum grounds, found only 19th century landscaping but there were signs of the foundations of the castle’s inner bailey curtain wall. (No 21: Spring 2011) *Photograph ©Martyn Everett.*

FINDING GRAVES: A plan and database showing the location of graves at Saffron Walden Cemetery is once again online, having been unavailable for some time. The Cemetery used to be administered by Uttlesford District Council and was on their website, but when they handed over control to the Town Council, the cemetery database was taken down. The Saffron Walden branch of the Essex Society for Family History, whose members carried out the original transcription, were anxious to make it available again, and access has now been agreed via www.recordinguttlesfordhistory.org.uk in the Uttlesford history section. The Recorders’ website is packed with local history information, freely provided by the Recorders, and is accessed by up to 150 users a week. (No 21: Spring 2011)

DIGGING UP MANUDEN: The Manuden Local History Society, under its chairman Fiona Bengtsen, in 2009 contributed to a national project to digitise Poor Law Union records for The National Archives at Kew. This is

now online and offers free access to material generated between Guardians and Poor Law authorities. The Bishop's Stortford Union 1834-52, which encompassed Manuden, is included and can be found at: <http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/documentsonline/workhouse.asp> In 2010, the Society held a successful fieldwalking exercise, discovering evidence of a Roman site. Now in 2011 they are holding a 'Big Dig' event on 4 and 5 April, overseen by Carezza Lewis, formerly of Channel 4 'Time Team'. About a dozen villagers have volunteered to dig a one-metre test pit in their gardens to uncover evidence of Manuden's history. (No 21: Spring 2011)

PASTURE IN THE PAST: In neighbouring Clavering, landscape historian Stuart Moore has recently completed a detailed study on the late Anglo-Saxon pastoral landscape of the area, to qualify for the Advanced Diploma in Historic Environment. Using archaeology, field survey, documents, field names, maps and aerial photography, he found that pastureland was a prominent feature from at least the Iron Age to the 11th century. Boundaries and field shapes indicate large enclosures, often with funnel entrances, used for livestock, connected by tracks with extensive areas of upland grazing. wood pasture meadows and greens. Source: *Historic Environment Newsletter*, February 2011 published by the Institute of Continuing Education at Cambridge: www.ice.cam.ac.uk (No 21: Spring 2011)



CHRISHALL MUSEUM: With the death of Chrishall historian Irene Cranwell, the collection of rural objects which she amassed and kept in a converted caravan, is also now coming to an end as a separate entity. The contents are being dispersed to various other places, including museums at Ashdon and Saffron Walden. The Local History Recorder for Chrishall, Fred Davies (Mrs. Cranwell's son-in-law), is sorting out the museum contents, which have been catalogued by Rosemarie Gant (Mrs. Cranwell's grand-daughter). The archives will, however, remain in the village. (No 21: Spring 2011)



In June 2011 the Castle Street Residents' Association celebrated their remarkable oral history project with an exhibition in the Town Hall, centred on a series of drawings of houses in Castle Street. Pictured are Douglas Kent (Society for the Protection of Ancient Buildings - SPAB) showing photos to Dick Jemmett (Saffron Walden Historical Society). *Photograph Gordon Ridgewell.*_(No 22: Autumn 2011)

During 2011 the Recorders of Uttlesford History (RUH), a network of historians over the district, have had a series of historical tours, organised by Debbie Lowe, including a medieval house in Church Street, the former youth hostel at Myddylton Place and the old houses of Manuden, courtesy of Recorder Fiona Bengtsen. A coach trip to the NRA at Kew is planned for November.



Photograph ©Gordon Ridgewell (No 22: Autumn 2011)



In June 2011, Ashdon Museum held a Farm Day displaying old farm machinery, such as this 1930s Fordson tractor, surrounded by museum volunteers. *Photograph Gordon Ridgewell.* (No 22: Autumn

2011)



In September 2011 in Saffron Walden Baptist Church there took place 'Mission Continued', a celebration of the 300th anniversary of Baptist Mission here, put together by Archivist John Maddams and a team of 40 helpers. *Photograph Gordon Ridgewell.* (No 22: Autumn 2011)

Cutting the cake at the 25th anniversary in March of the Essex Society for Family History (NW Essex branch) are Stan Sutherland and Janice Sharpe, who have contributed enormously to the success of the branch since it was formed in 1986. A special feature of the anniversary party was an entertainment presented by Christopher South of BBC Radio Cambridgeshire. *Photograph Michael Furlong.* (No 22: Autumn 2011)



In September 2011, the History Group in Clavering welcomed almost 300 visitors to 'Clavering Remembered', an exhibition of 20th century village history. (No 22: Autumn 2011)
