

History News Archive 2012 - 2013

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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VICTORIA COUNTY HISTORY (VCH) has, as its name implies, been in process since Victorian times, as an ambitious project to record in scholarly detail the entire history of every county. Fourteen counties are complete and another 13 are in progress including Essex for which information can be found on www.essexpast.net The Essex VCH has just celebrated its 60th anniversary and is currently organising a Diamond Jubilee Appeal, having suffered the loss of county council grant. A recent development has been to extend the research into NW Essex, with the Newport Victoria County History Project, which is now well under way. Begun in the autumn of 2009, its aim is to produce a history of the parish in accordance with VCH guidelines, making extensive use of the primary source material, mainly in the Essex Record Office and the National Archives. Those taking part in the project are all volunteers: Anthony Tuck (Chairman of Newport Local History Group), David Evans (Local History Recorder for Newport), Gillian Williamson (co-author of *A History of Littlebury*), Ben Cowell (National Trust), and Bernard Nurse (co-author of *A Village in Time*). James Bettley, author of the revised Pevsner *Architectural Guide to Essex*, is contributing the section on the built environment of Newport. They hope to wind up by autumn 2012, and the project will be published on the Internet in the first instance. Work so far completed includes sections on education, transport and communications, the development of the main estates in Newport, and the descent of the manorial lordships of Newport and Shortgrove. Once accepted by the VCH Editorial Board, sections will appear as 'Work in Progress' in the Newport section of the VCH Essex website:

www.victoriacountyhistory.ac.uk/counties/essex

The sections on manorial lordships and on education have already been placed on the website. Meanwhile the county-wide appeal continues, and any person or society who would like to contribute financially to the Appeal Fund is asked to email martinstuchfield@btinetnet.com The Saffron Walden Historical Society, which publishes the journal, is among many local history groups which have made donations. (No 23: Spring 2012)

DIG & SOW is the name of a major archaeological event which takes place in Clavering on Saturday 12 May. It will involve digging a one-square-metre test pit in over 30 of the village gardens to discover the origins of various parts of the village. A similar event took place on a smaller scale at Manuden last year, and has been mounted for several years at Little Hallingbury, but Clavering is the only village in Essex chosen to take part in this special event, which is part of the London 2012 Cultural Olympiad, funded by Arts Council England. The theme of the event is 'Home' and participants will be searching for traces of earlier settlement in the grounds of their own homes. It is called 'Dig & Sow' because, as well as digging, participants will also be 'sowing' a specially-made charm at the bottom of their pit, and will be given wildflower seed to sow on the returned topsoil or elsewhere in their garden. Altogether six counties in eastern England are taking part, with one village in each county, so that the total number of test pits will be 205, equal to the number of nations taking part in the Olympics.



Overseeing analysis of the finds is Dr Carenza Lewis of Access Archaeology Cambridge (pictured here), formerly with Channel 4's 'Time Team', who lives in NW Essex and devotes herself to encouraging people to discover their own archaeology as a community. She will be visiting the Clavering test-pits on the day with her team of archaeologists. The Clavering Dig & Sow is a community event under the umbrella of the Clavering History Group, who welcome anyone from other villages as well as Clavering who would like to help with the digging, sieving and processing of finds on the day. www.onlandguardpoint.com(No 23: Spring 2012)

RECORDERS OF UTTLESFORD HISTORY (RUH) are looking for more Local History Recorders to help with the important task of recording the past and present of their communities. The RUH offers much support including advice, equipment, workshops, a database and a website where material can be published. There are about 40 volunteer Recorders across Uttlesford, but vacancies in several villages including Ashdon, Great Canfield, Langley, Lindsell, the Easters, the Rodings, the Sampfords and Wendens Ambo. The Recorders' website, which has recently recorded its 20,000th visitor, can be found at www.recordinguttlesfordhistory.org.uk (No 23: Spring 2012)

THE HUNDRED PARISHES: A new initiative to raise awareness, enhance enjoyment and strengthen protection of the rich and diverse heritage of this area has just been launched. Entitled 'The Hundred Parishes', it covers an area of 350 square miles in NW Essex, NE Hertfordshire and south Cambridgeshire. Although the precise boundaries are still under discussion, it relates to parts of the districts of Uttlesford, Braintree, Chelmsford, Epping Forest, East Herts, North Herts and South Cambridgeshire, and includes all or part of some 100 parishes with a total population of around 130,000. The idea of this newly-designated heritage area came from David Heathcote, an architectural historian and author who lives in Saffron Walden... His idea was taken up by a small group of local historians, conservationists and CPREssex, who sought to identify what was so special about this area. They noted a certain distinctiveness, an amalgam of attractive settlements, historic landscapes, numerous listed buildings, ancient field patterns, hedgerows, woodlands, sunken lanes, extensive rights-of-way, plenty of good pubs – and a minimum of intrusive elements such as big commercial developments, major roads or aircraft noise... In June 2012 a conference was held to set up a constitution for The Hundred Parishes Society. The next stage is a website, aimed at promoting the vision, and a quality guidebook. Eventually the public website will expand with information on history, walks, local books, facilities and other aspects of each of the hundred parishes. Further information: hundredparishes@btinternet.com (No 23: Spring 2012)



SUN INN: The famous pargetting on the front of the Sun Inn, Saffron Walden has been saved from collapse, thanks to the careful work of plaster conservator, Torquil McNeilage (pictured). The new owner of numbers 25-27 Church Street had been undertaking detailed investigation of the building before commencing major

renovation. When scaffolding was put up to examine the 'human' plaster figures, it was found that the deterioration was even worse than feared and saving the famous plasterwork became the priority. So extremely fragile was its condition that the figures were boarded over for protection during the recent harsh winter. Finally, this summer a once-in-a-generation project of repairs has begun with conservators using advanced conservation techniques and a range of lime-based materials compatible with the original construction. The repairs have been successful in securing the future of this important part of the town's historic fabric. In

spite of the urgency of this work, no grants were available and all the costs had to be borne privately. It is the good fortune of this iconic building that its new owner is Douglas Kent, since he works as Technical and Research Director of the Society for the Protection of Ancient Buildings and understands the importance of sympathetic restoration. A full update on the project will appear in a later issue of the Journal. *Photograph (c)Douglas Kent. (No 24: Autumn 2012)*

WALDEN CASTLE SURVEY: Dr Tim Dennis of the University of Essex and local volunteer Christine Sharpe surveying the site of Walden Castle as part of a geophysical survey of the inner bailey area. Ground-penetrating radar, supplemented by a resistivity survey of selected areas, is being used to investigate the extent of buried features in the Museum and Castle grounds around the ruined keep. Wet weather has delayed completion of the survey, so the results will not be known until later this year. The Museum hopes to provide an update in its next special exhibition 'Castle & Community' which opened on 15 September and runs until 27 January 2013, preceded by an Anglo-Saxon living history camp and a shield-making exercise. Meanwhile the museum is hoping to carry out a dig next summer on a non-scheduled part of the castle complex in the outer bailey ditch. (No 24: Autumn 2012)

SCOUTS CENTENARY: Saffron Walden Scouts celebrate their centenary on 12 October 2012, when it will be exactly 100 years since 36 boys were enrolled in the first troop at the Parish Room, under Scoutmaster Mr H.W. Fells. The troop suffered decline during WW1 when most of the leaders were in the Forces. But the Scouts carried on acting as patients for bandaging practice at the Red Cross and VAD hospital housed in Walden Place. When Mr Fells came back from the war, he ran the troop again, moving it to the Mission room in Castle Street. In 1920 they started their own band, which led the procession when the war memorial was unveiled in the High Street. Today the Scouts, Cubs and Beavers continue to flourish and are busy gathering together their history. (No 24: Autumn 2012)



BLUE PLAQUES: Six new Blue Plaques are being unveiled in Saffron Walden this spring, commemorating notable men who have lived in the town over the centuries. Some are well-known, such as the philanthropist, banker and botanist George Stacey Gibson (1813-83); builder of the first Eddystone Lighthouse, Henry Winstanley (1644-1703); and the designer and printmaker Edward Bawden (1903-89). The poet and scholar Gabriel Harvey (1545-1630) is largely forgotten now, and few people know that composer Gordon Jacob (1895-1984) or Jack Cardiff, Oscar-winning cinematographer and director (1914-2009), both lived here. Hitherto there have been only two Blue Plaques – for martyr John Newman on the Town Hall and for Chief Constable William Campling at Bridge End. It is hoped to fund some more later on, and among possible candidates are Sir Thomas Smith, William Winstanley and Edwin Smith. The locations are: Bawden (2 Park Lane), Harvey (Gold Street); Winstanley (5 Museum Street); Jacob (1 Audley Road); Cardiff (7a High Street) and Gibson (Hill House, High Street). The aluminium alloy plaques have been funded by the Saffron Walden Initiative and Saffron Walden Town Council through their Jubilee Fund and the plaques designed by

David Riches of Visible Edge. A trail information leaflet will be published once the scheme is complete.



TOWNS TV PROGRAMME: Nicholas Crane during the filming of a forthcoming programme in the BBC 'Towns' series featuring Saffron Walden. Filming took place in the autumn, with input from several

local historians and others. Details are still under wraps, but aspects of history researched for the programme included the Battle Ditches and early development, the Saffron crocus industry, the Parliamentary debates during the Civil War, the coming of the railway in the 19th century and the pargetting on town houses. The presenter also spoke to the 'WeAreResidents' group who are campaigning to prevent huge new housing developments here. Nicholas Crane was giving nothing away when he spoke at the recent Walden Literary Festival, but it is thought that the theme of the programme will centre on the past and future development of Saffron Walden, and the challenge of how such market towns survive in the modern day and continue to provide services to people while retaining their character. (No 25: Spring 2013)



MAP EVENT: Local historians crowded round to take a closer look at a map recently discovered in a barn at Audley End Farm. Dated 1757, it is one year earlier than the much larger 1758 map which, until recently, was kept at the Town Hall but has now been sent to the Essex Record Office.

Both are by leading mapmaker of the day, John Eyre. The map was in a very poor condition when discovered, and has been conserved by the ERO who have put digital copies on their SEAX website. The map itself is still too fragile to be displayed again, so a unique opportunity was offered in March 2013 to come and have a look. The event aroused a lot of interest with a constant stream of visitors, many of whom also listened to a series of four lectures about county maps, military mapping, the 1757 map and how it has been stabilised and conserved. In addition, there were other local maps on display, and a display of work done by local Cubs and Scouts, using an ERO resource pack, towards their Local Heritage Badge. (No 25: Spring 2013)

WARTIME HISTORY: The two world wars continue to provide the stimulus to much local historical activity, from books such as the recently published *Clavering at War*, to surveys and excavations. In Tilty the newly-formed Archaeology & Local History Group has been awarded a grant of £3,700 to investigate the experience of WW2 in the village. The grant - which has come from a project called All Our Stories, part of the

Heritage Lottery Fund – is aimed at enabling the group ‘to communicate and commemorate the wartime experiences of people in a small rural community’, with stories and memories, documents and artefacts, website, talks, walks and other events. Next year is the centenary of the start of WW1 in 1914, and the Recorders of Uttlesford History are carrying out a survey of Uttlesford war memorials, while the *Saffron Walden Historical Journal* will be publishing a themed issue on WW1 experiences in the town and villages around (contributions to both projects can be sent to the Editor). (No 25: Spring 2013)

THE WALDEN PAGEANT 1910: Professor Arthur Burns of Kings College, London, who lives in Saffron Walden, has helped set up a nation-wide study of historic pageants. The three-year project, commencing in November 2013, is entitled ‘The Redress of the Past: Historical Pageants in Britain 1905-2016’, and has been awarded a grant of £777,581 by the Arts & Humanities Research Council. Uttlesford is to form one of the case studies. No doubt their remit will include the famous Walden Pageant of 1910, ‘Scenes from Old Walden’, which took place from 10-12 May 1910 at the Town Hall, with a libretto by Hugh Cranmer Byng and lyrics by Lancelot Cranmer Byng. The history scenes from 54 BC to AD1671 included Romano-British tribes, a Saxon banquet, the burial of Geoffrey de Mandeville, the growth of saffron, Queen Elizabeth at Audley End, Cromwell in the Civil War, Pepys and the Mazer Bowl, the Flying Servant of Walden 1669 and Walden Fair at Audley End in Stuart times. The event ended with a grand procession of all the actors. The Town Library archives include over 50 photographs, and music of the songs. With discussions currently taking place about how to celebrate the Saffron Walden Charter 500th anniversary next year, what better than a revival of this historic Pageant! (No 26: Autumn 2013)

TOWNS BBC TV PROGRAMME: An hour-long documentary programme devoted to Saffron Walden was screened on BBC on 28 May 2013. Hosted by Nicholas Crane, it centred very largely on the town’s history showing how change had impacted on Walden over the centuries – and wondering how it would fare against the new challenge of huge development proposals. Interspersed with stunning aerial views of the town, Nicholas Crane visited various places including St Mary’s Church, the Market Place and the allotments - here he met David Smale cultivating saffron, the crop which made the town famous. At Audley End, he interviewed Amanda Murray, eldest daughter of Lord Braybrooke, who explained how the eight daughters of the family cannot inherit the estate. He tried out the craft of pargetting with Bill Sargent, and sampled wines on sale at the railway station shop, and the beer produced by a new brewery company. Councillors, an estate agent, campaigners and skatepark members all

gave their views about new housing. He met with Blue Badge Guide, Sarah Kirkpatrick about the Battle Ditches. The presenter described Saffron Walden as 'unusually intoxicating, seductive, incredibly alluring', but concluded that, as in many other parts of the country, it was facing 'a new Battle of Britain' over housing plans. (No 26: Autumn 2013)

DIG ON THE COMMON: Huge public interest was aroused this summer when Carolyn Wingfield, Curator of Saffron Walden Museum co-ordinated an archaeological dig, in conjunction with Dr Carenza Lewis and a team from Access Cambridge Archaeology. The Saffron Walden Castle Bailey Project achieved its principal object, of identifying the location of part of the outer bailey of the castle, on the NW side of the Common.... The outer defensive ditch must have taken much effort to dig out by hand. As it was laid out in straight lines with an angled corner, it is surmised that as well as being the outer bailey, it could have



been the first town ditch of Geoffrey de Mandeville's new market town around 1140. Many questions remain, not least why the well-known Battle Ditches follow a different course. The wider benefits of the dig lay in the involvement of 30 local school students from Newport Free Grammar School and Saffron Walden County High School, who did all the hard graft of digging trenches in the ditches almost 800 years after they were first laid out. Pupils from the school contributed to an online blog following the progress of the Dig from 19 to 25 July, from the removal of the turf on the first day, to the final summing-up by Carenza Lewis at the end.... The Dig attracted large numbers of visitors and BBC Radio Essex came to interview several of the team. On 14 September, the results of the Dig were presented at another well-attended event in the Castle grounds, with Carolyn, Carenza and some of the students on hand to answer questions about the displays of finds. The project was funded by a grant from the Heritage Lottery Fund's All Our Stories programme. (No 26: Autumn 2013)

TREASURE TROVE: Saffron Walden Museum has set up an appeal to raise up to £60,000 to purchase important new 'treasure' finds for the archaeology collection. All have been found locally by metal detectorists in

Uttlesford and have been declared treasure trove under the Treasure Act - this means that museums have a brief opportunity to buy them. Most of the funding can come from grants, but a sum of £7,500 needs to be raised locally. The finds are all gold or silver, the most important being an Anglo-Saxon gold ring dated 580-650 AD, engraved with a figure holding a cross and birds of prey in a style characteristic of the early 7th century, the 'age of Sutton Hoo'... It is clearly a very high status piece, possibly royal. Its unique combination of late Roman-Christian and pagan north-European imagery seem to encapsulate this formative period of English history when the emergent Anglo-Saxon kingdoms were coming under the influence of Christian missions and Continental politics. The other finds which the Museum would like to acquire are an Anglo Saxon silver mount and silver tag, a small hoard of pre-Roman Gallo-Belgic gold coins and a Tudor-Jacobean gold ring. (No 26: Autumn 2013)

GENEALOGY: A recent TV programme, in the 'Who Do You Think You Are' series, was partly filmed in Uttlesford. It featured actress Lesley Sharp, who traced her roots to this part of the world. There were shots of her walking through fields of corn, visiting Tilty Church and researching in Essex Record Office. She commented on the beauty of the local countryside. (No 26: Autumn 2013)



PRESTIGIOUS AWARD: Douglas Kent received an award in London from comedienne Sue Perkins in recognition of his work in saving and restoring the important pargetting at the Grade I Listed medieval house, 25-27 Church Street, part of the Sun Inn. Douglas, who is a historic building surveyor, was Joint Winner of the 2013 Museums + Heritage Restoration or Conservation

Award – the conservation equivalent of a Bafta – well done, Douglas! (No 26: Autumn 2013)



BLUE PLAQUES: Margaret Hyatt and David Jacob, widow and son of composer Gordon Jacob, unveiled a Blue Plaque in his memory at a ceremony in Audley Road where he lived from 1959-1984. During a weekend of six unveiling ceremonies organised by John Ready and the Saffron Walden Initiative, another took place at the High Street, performed by

the wife and son of Jack Cardiff (1914-2009), the cinematographer who lived there from 1993-2000. Richard Bawden unveiled a Blue Plaque commemorating his father Edward Bawden (1903-1989), the famous painter who lived in Park Lane for the last 19 years of his life. Historian Martyn Everett spoke about the notable writer, Gabriel Harvey (1545-1630) outside the house in Gold Street where he lived (see pp. 11-13). Back in the High Street, author Jeremy Collingwood unveiled a Blue Plaque outside the home in Hill House of philanthropist George Stacey Gibson (1818-83). In Museum Street, the Mayor and Mayoress unveiled a commemorative plaque regarding inventor Henry Winstanley (1644-1703). A further six Blue Plaques are planned in the future. (No 26: Autumn 2013)

QUAKER ARCHIVES: The extensive records of the Society of Friends relating to Thaxted and Saffron Walden have recently been transferred for conservation and safekeeping to Essex Record Office. Until now they have been kept at the Meeting House in the High Street, but storage conditions were not ideal and few people were able to use them for research. They contain a wealth of material dating back to the 17th century, including 43 volumes of minutes, lists of members, births marriages and burials material, numerous certificates, distraints, accounts, deeds and documents on all sorts of subjects – the Quaker school, payments to the poor, buildings, the burial ground In addition there is material relating to meeting houses in Bardfield, Dunmow, Elsenham, Stansted, Felsted, Stebbing – most of it from the 18th century onwards. Altogether it forms a treasure trove of material that will be of great interest to local and family historians. (No 26: Autumn 2013)
