

Newsletter

NOVEMBER 2016



From Winter to Spring, 2016-2017



John Dunsford, Myra Green and Alex Farnell

May I start by thanking Myra and her team for organising such an interesting Members' Evening in mid-September when the archaeologist, Alex Farnell, gave such a fascinating lecture on 'A Roman Mansio on the Edge of Topsham'. Please see below for Anthony Jennings's summary of the event.

What a successful season we have had! All our volunteers, front of house and behind the scenes, have been pushed to their limits but responded valiantly. Our 'War Comes to Topsham' exhibition keeps going thanks to Rosemary and Marian adding new information as it becomes available.

Mark Dant's 'Shopping in Topsham' attracted great local interest and was also the subject of our last public lecture of the year when Mark and Liz Hodges put on a virtuoso performance, showing that nothing seems to evolve faster than shopping.



Mark Dant and Liz Hodges

Now it is all eyes on next year. Work has started on giving greater prominence to the Merchant's House. The first floor should be completed before the opening of the 2017 season when we will also be mounting a major exhibition on 'The Churches of Topsham'. Further details are provided by Anthony and by Rachel Nichols.

We will of course be following developments with HMS *Terror* as the Canadian government decides what to do next now that the ship has been discovered.

Meanwhile, conservation work is being carried out by our Collections team and Maintenance will be working on part of our building that can only be reached out of season. Inevitably, they will identify further work for subsequent years. Most of us do not even see these activities but their efforts are considerable and much appreciated.



Volunteer Thank You Party - November

May I repeat my thanks to you for your support which allows us to face the future with greater confidence. Anything you can do to help increase membership or to encourage volunteering would be much appreciated and would help to spread the load.

Finally, may I wish you all a happy

Christmas and a peaceful New Year.

John Dunsford

Winter Events January

We have two January events to get you out and about in the New Year, one land based and one estuary based.

Saturday 14th January

A bird-watching cruise on the Exe has been jointly arranged with the Topsham Birdwatching and Naturalist Society. *Sea Dream*, will leave Topsham Quay at 2 p.m. and sail around the Exe Estuary. There will be an expert on board to identify and talk about the birds

The cost of a ticket is £15-50 which includes a cream tea at the Museum after the cruise. There are only a limited number of places available, so don't delay: if you would like a ticket please either e-mail me — secretary@topshammuseum.org.uk or phone me on 01392-876339.

On **Sunday 22nd January**, writes Rachel Nichols, we are taking the successful 'Shops in Topsham' exhibition to Matthews Hall, together with an extended display of Graham Ward's photographs. And at **3pm** on the same day there will be a repeat of the sell-out lecture,

'Shops in Topsham',
by Mark Dant and Liz Hodges.

Look out for posters after Christmas giving full details.

Who's Who of Volunteers

TEAROOM ORGANISER

Jennifer Bliss

873440

SHOP

Judy Wood Rogers

874641

GROUP BOOKINGS

Kathy Morris

87681

VOLUNTEER CO ORDINATOR

Michael Norman

879808

SECRETARY

Jan Betteridge



Changes to the Constitution

At the last Annual General Meeting a resolution was passed to allow members to be notified of meetings by e-mail if they opted for this method. The Constitution has now been amended to allow for this and has been lodged with, and accepted by, the Charity Commission. It would greatly help the Museum if you would agree to your AGM notices and other communications being sent to you by e-mail. As you will appreciate, the cost of postage is high and we are also very dependent on a few willing volunteers to do the printing, collating, folding, envelope-stuffing and delivery of the notices — and newsletters.

If you agree to communications by e-mail would you please let us know by e-mail to: info@topshammuseum.org.uk ensuring that your full name is shown.

Thank you.

Jan Betteridge

Developments in the Merchant's House

The Museum's planning group has been concentrating on how best to raise the profile of the Merchant's house to take full advantage of its potential and make it more attractive to visitors. Changes will be on a phased basis with the first phase covering the first floor and being implemented over the winter ready for our opening next spring.



Henry Lindsay

Henry Lyndsay, the museum designer, is working with a small team to specify and implement the changes. Their objective is not to change the character of the rooms but to make them more authentic and to bring out the stories of the house and its occupants. We envisage that: the most notable change will be the Entwistle Room, which will be redesigned as an introductory display to the House, with a combined timeline of physical changes and ownership; in the bedroom and the parlour we are opening up the fireplaces and each room will be redisplayed to enhance the appearance of a room in 1700.

An enormous amount of research has been carried out on how a merchant would have lived in that period. (If anyone has a spare potty of the period we could borrow ...?) some of the displays in the corridors and landings will also be changed and all this will reflect the feel of entering a merchant's house from the sail loft.

By the time you read this the builders should already have completed the work on the fireplaces and immediately after Christmas any electrical work will have been completed, leaving a clear environment for the displays to be put in place. At least that is the theory; experience shows that March is going to be a busy month. Do come and enjoy the new displays during 2017.

Anthony Jennings

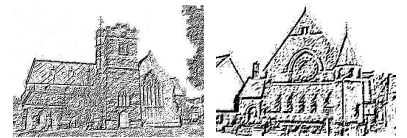
EXHIBITIONS 2017

'Churches of Topsham'

The main exhibition for the year will be 'Churches of Topsham'.



St Nicholas celebrates its 150th anniversary in 2017 and as well as looking at the main non-conformist history and meeting-places in Topsham we have invited both St Margaret's and Holy Cross to contribute to the exhibition.



There will also be a lecture and other events to complement this major exhibition.

'Thank You, Miss Holman'



In March 2017 it will be 50 years since Miss Dorothy Holman opened her museum in the sail loft at 25 Strand, and a small display will commemorate this at the start of the season.

'Topsham to Newfoundland'

As part of a symposium organised by the Devonshire Association many organisations in Devon are putting on events and displays showing the links between the county and Newfoundland. In Topsham we have strong links, including ships trading with, and families settling in, distant Newfoundland.



There will be a special Museum event on **Friday 7 April** as part of the county-wide programme.

Rachel Nichols



Visit of Captain George Peacock's Family



Peter and Monica Cookson and Angela and Bob Connor meeting the Cygnet, designed by their great-great grandfather.

We were very pleased to welcome recently two of Captain George Peacock's great-great grandchildren who visited the Museum in October. In addition to the *Cygnet* and the model of HMS *Roberts* in the River Gallery, we have the Peacock display and multimedia presentation on his life and

inventions. We also hold a large archive of material about his inventions, surveys, correspondence and maritime logs from some of his journeys. Peter Cookson from Australia and his sister Angela from Wales, and their spouses, spent a very happy afternoon looking at the archive and talking about the family.



Captain G. Peacock

George Peacock was born in 1805 and came from a seafaring family. At the age of 17 he invented a screw propeller which still forms the basis of propellers used to this day. Other inventions include an apparatus to turn sea-water into drinking water, the Nautilus, the first safety jacket (life jacket) and refuge buoys. His most important achievement was as the surveyor of routes for the future Panama Canal started in 1831, some 80 years earlier than the canal constructed along the same route and opened in 1915. He also surveyed the route of the Corinth Canal. A truly remarkable man.

Catriona Batty

Topsham: Unfinished Business

Extract from Jane's Journal

The nine year old Lady Jane Grey writes about her maid from Topsham in her diary which has been transcribed by Margaret Ball:

October 7 1546

....Mr. Aylmer, who was my tutor at Bradgate, was overmuch strict. Two days before I left he caned me on both palms because there were two errors in my translation from Plato. Phoebe bathed my hands with witch-hazel. Phoebe Wylliams is my maid. She has been with me since I was four years old, and has become both companion and friend. Her family live in a little sea port called Topsham, in Devonshire. It lies on the Exe estuary and looks out across the water towards Powderham Castle, home of the Courtenays, Earls of Devon. Phoebe says,



'Tis not quite sea, yet more than river. 'Tis the last place the good Lord made, and he didn't stop to finish it or we would have had sand, not mud.'

An Ancient Travelodge in Topsham?



On 15th September a capacity audience of Museum Society members enjoyed an evening lecture

given by local archaeologist Alex Farnell.

His subject was 'A Roman Mansio on the Edge of Topsham' and I am sure I was not alone in thinking this was a typo.

Alex brought us up to date on the archaeological dig which took place on the west side of the Exeter Road by Wessex Close where Heritage Homes have started building houses. The dig revealed that there had been a substantial Roman building on the site although, frustratingly, a significant proportion of it lies under a tree which is covered by a protective order and is therefore inaccessible. The material uncovered suggested that, although substantial, the building had not been a high-status villa and was most probably a lodging house for travelling officials known as a *mansio*, which was apparently a common feature of Roman roads.



Alex's passion for the work he does was infectious and resulted in a most informative and enjoyable lecture. We were also fortunate that it was a lovely evening and we were able to enjoy our pre-lecture drinks in the garden, which is one of the delights of the Museum.

Anthony Jennings



Lunchtime Lectures 2017

An exciting series of lunchtime lectures has been arranged for 2017.

And if you already have your 2017 diary and are a keen lecture-goer you might like to make a note of the lecture dates to the end of October.

Full details of these will appear in subsequent 2017 newsletters.

With thanks to Anna Adcock for arranging the programme.

APRIL 25th

'Seaton Down Hoard'

Thomas Cadbury—
Royal Albert Memorial Museum

MAY 30th

'The Jurassic Coast'

Speaker from Jurassic Coast Team

JUNE 27th

**'Looking at Churches and Chapels
in Topsham'**

Roger Thorne, FSA,
Past President of the
Devonshire Association

JULY 25th

**'Changing Perceptions of
Topsham'**

Dr Sadru Bhanji

No Lecture in August

SEPTEMBER 26th

'Beatrix Potter'

Emma Laws,
Victoria and Albert Museum

OCTOBER 31st

**'Meeting Places of the Living
and Dead'**

Dr Naomi Howell,
University of Exeter

Anna Adcock

'War comes to Topsham, and Matthews Hall

As part of Topsham Museum's contribution to the WWI Centenary, a Lottery-funded research project identified those who served from Topsham and formed this year's major exhibition, retained for the whole season.



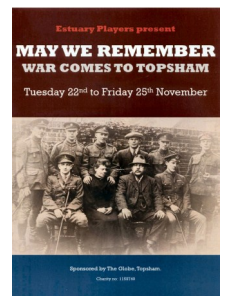
Marian Grimshaw and Rosemary Hatch

Thanks to immense research by Rosemary Hatch, Marian Grimshaw and Catriona Batty who found the pictures, the exhibition was a great success. The visitor numbers increased during the autumn and new information and photos are still being received.

After the exhibition was taken down, the display boards, (*see below*) went up again in Matthews Hall, where, as a fitting finale to the project, Topsham Estuary Players produced a stage play, featuring local characters and the stories discovered. The stage set was based in "The Lighter" bar, the audience being mixed with members of the cast as customers.

The production, written by Alan Caig and Janine Warre, at times humorous, at others poignant and tragic, has been filmed for the Museum archive.

Major findings have been summarised in a book which whilst not for sale, will be held for reference at the Museum and at other historical repositories. The files from the project, together with a database of over 350 local people who served in various capacities, will be available to visitors next season both in paper and digital format.



The programme



Can You Write an Article for the Museum Journal?

Topsham Times is published annually by the Museum Society and original articles on the history of Topsham, related Exe Estuary heritage and natural history would be welcome for next year's issue.

Articles can range from just 500 words to 3000 words. Please ring the editor, Cathy Maguire, on 01392-873839 or e-mail her on c.maguire@ex.ac.uk if you would like more information to discuss a potential article. The deadline for next summer's issue is **31st January 2017**, but ideas for future issues are also welcome.

