



# Newsletter

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## Who's Who of Volunteers

### TEAROOM ORGANISER

Jennifer Bliss 873440

### SHOP

Judy Wood Rogers 874641

### GROUP BOOKINGS

June Swan 877468

### VOLUNTEER CO-ORDINATOR

Andy Simey 876649

### SECRETARY

Jan Betteridge 876339

## News in Brief

- ♦ **Membership is increasing**
- ♦ **Tearoom customers up by 25% this summer**
- ♦ **Exciting new acquisitions**
- ♦ **Details of exhibitions for 2014**
- ♦ **Topsham Museum features in ITV programme**

I've just returned from showing friends around our Museum and I was very proud to be doing so! My thanks to the Tea Room and the Shop staff for bringing our visit to a delightful close. The Vivien Leigh Centenary Exhibition is wonderful with all the extra exhibits that Rachel has managed to borrow and display so well. The special Topsham link with Vivien Leigh is further explained in the interesting booklet that goes with the exhibition, which is on sale in the shop. Do come and see it before the Museum closes next month! The exhibition of quilts in the tea room has created a great deal of interest and admiration and even a few offers to buy them! Another surprise – to me at least - has been the Hester Holman Exhibition.

Hester, Dorothy Holman's younger sister, was a trained artist and exhibited in London. On display are some delightful examples of her paintings, drawings, sculptures and prints, all beautifully displayed by Jan Betteridge and Cathy Maguire. I do hope you have enjoyed the wonderful exhibitions this season.



Jan has been the driving force in renewing our museum accreditation. Because the process has changed, this was a much bigger job than expected.

The work has been completed with wide consultation and we now feel we can face the Arts Council with confidence. Our members-only programme continues on the 17 September when we will have a Quiz hosted by Nick Maguire.

This season the weather has been kind and I am pleased to tell you that visitor numbers are well up on last year. The Gardens have survived the heat wave, thanks to judicious watering and the Greenhouse has had a beautiful first summer since its restoration.

Membership continues to rise, providing a steady and much needed income for the Museum and I cannot tell you how much the Trustees appreciate this support.

*John Dunsford*



The Monarch butterfly

A visitor was recently shown the inside of the beautiful cabinet, dating from 1688, on long-term loan to the Museum from the V&A. As no one could tell him why the picture in marquetry of William of Orange featured a butterfly he promised to find out. His explanation was very interesting.

17th century Dutch and British immigrants were apparently much impressed by *Danaus plexippus*, a large orange butterfly, which they saw in North America. Because of its colour they named it the Monarch after Prince William of Orange, Stadtholder of Holland and (in 1688) King of England. The butterfly is also sometimes called the *King Billy*.



*Catriona Batty*

Snow in August (The Devil’s Footprints)

So - it snowed in Topsham when TV presenter Julia Bradbury came to try to solve the mystery of the Devil’s footprints which had appeared in the neighbourhood in

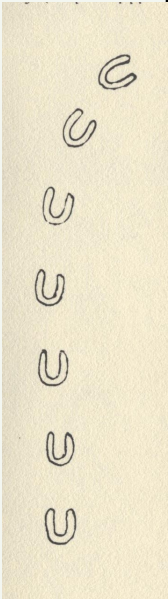


1855! Artificial snow was created in the riverside garden and Charles Potter was asked to help Julia re-create the footprints.

On the night of 8<sup>th</sup> February 1855, during a period of freezing weather, something or someone left a strange trail of “footprints” in the snow over a wide area through Topsham, Exmouth, Littleham, Lymptone, Woodbury, Starcross and Teignmouth.

The trail went over walls and roofs, through fields, up to people’s front doors, along narrow walls and in walled gardens. Each print measured four inches by two and a half inches, with an average of eight inches between each tread, in a direct line (shown below). Some local people suggested that it was the work of the Devil; certainly the strange prints in the snow looked rather like hoof prints. All the witnesses agreed on one thing however, that the prints appeared to have been branded in the frozen snow with a hot iron! It is interesting that none of the contemporary newspaper accounts mentioned that the Exe and the Teign were both frozen over at the time and that the “creature” (whatever it was) would have had no difficulty crossing the rivers on foot. That winter the ice was thick enough for a party to be held on the frozen river at Exeter, with a stove standing on the ice.

Many fantastic theories were advanced for this mystifying phenomenon. Local and national newspapers put forward their own explanations for the hoof prints and the subject generated a lot of correspondence. Theories included a kangaroo escapee from a menagerie in Sidmouth, a great bustard, rat, otter, domestic cat, toad, the hind foot of a badger or even a mythological Icelandic uniped! Many superstitious villagers were frightened to go out after sunset because they believed that the marks had been made by the Devil himself. Will the TV programme suggest a new theory? Look out for it in November as part of the ITV *Mystery Maps* series



Tea Room

We are delighted to tell you that the tea room has done over 25% more business this year. The monetary value of this contribution to the museum society is extremely important. However, because it's “only serving teas”, I don't think the majority of us realise just how demanding a busy afternoon can be.



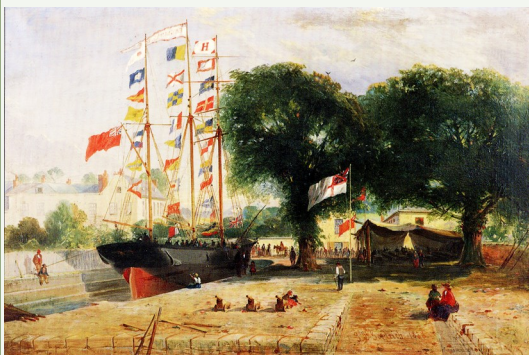
Visitors enjoying tea in the Museum garden

On only two days during the whole of the 2012 season did the afternoon takings come to over £200 but this year the record has been exceeded on **eight occasions** already and that does not yet include the last week in August. For a weekend team of three this means constant hard work. Moreover, weekday teams of two volunteers have regularly exceeded £140 this season, requiring an equally huge effort. Overall this is a very commendable achievement for all concerned.

Thanks to all of you! Well done! Although it is often hard work, I must say that helping in the tea room is great fun and very companionable. We know that what we do is a significant generator of funds for the running of the museum and we are very proud of that.

*John Claxton*

## ***England's Rose*—the first ship to use the Topsham Dry Dock**



Topsham Museum has been negotiating for a year to purchase this painting and we are now able to display it in the museum. Painted in 1858 by James B. Goodrich, the painting depicts an important piece of Topsham history, showing the ceremonial opening of the dry dock (now Strand Court) and houses on the Strand. The ship, built in Topsham, is proudly flying the Holman flag.

This painting had a chequered history before coming to us. Stolen from the original owner during the 1980s, we understand it was sold at Bonham's in 1991. When the painting again came into an auction house last year we were able to provide photos of the original painting and, using these the Art Loss Register, carried out an investigation with the police. We have now reached an agreement with the Art Loss Register and have been able to purchase the painting directly from the estate.

**This is an important acquisition for Topsham Museum and members wish to make a donation towards the cost of acquiring the painting and preparing it for display.**

### ***The Museum Trustees***

## **Membership**

General membership has gone up by 13% this year, and Life Membership has done even better; up by 50%, so we are very pleased that one of our goals this year, to increase membership, is working. Did you know that you could become a Life member? The current Life subscription is £100 for an individual and £150 for two people living at the same address. Next April, as agreed at the last Annual General Meeting of the Society, all fees are being raised a little for the first time in many years. Museum costs are increasing, as they are for everyone, so we need to keep a careful eye on our budget if we are to maintain our standards and continue to achieve a really thriving and interesting local Museum.

Another of our goals this year was to provide two special events for members. The Alex Leger lecture on his work as a producer of the BBC *Blue Peter* programme was a sell-out and most of the places for our next event, a Fun Quiz night on 17 September, are already taken. We are delighted that we have had such a good response to both events, and are now working on new ideas for next season. We extend a big thank you to all members for your continued support and ideas, and we hope you will enjoy the rest of the activities being put on at the Museum this season.

### ***Rosalind Beetham***

## **The Great Suffrage Pilgrimage**

On 4th July members of the Museum, dressed in Edwardian costume, took part in a commemorative march through the town as part of the events associated with the centenary of the 1913 march from Land's End to Hyde Park. An active branch of the Suffragist movement did exist in Topsham in 1913, led by Mrs Frood, the wife of the local doctor.



Marchers at  
Topsham Station

Our marchers donned their costumes again as part of the Topsham Carnival Procession and received a highly commended award!



## Town Fayre Coffee Morning



On 20<sup>th</sup> August the Museum welcomed visitors to our annual Town Fayre coffee morning. Over 100 people came along to enjoy coffee in the garden, as well as to shop from the various stalls and chancing their luck on the side-shows. Many arrived on bicycles to ease the burden of carrying their wares home!

The usual gang of willing volunteers had been hard at work preparing for this fundraising event. Posters had been designed, produce collected, cakes baked, cupboards searched for “Good as New” items, and raffle prizes donated. Gazebos were scrounged, erected in the museum garden, and much of the shop stock had been whisked onto a table outdoors. Tea room staff stood by with tea and coffee pots fully charged and cups and biscuits laid-out. Someone had even fixed the fine weather! The whole event was orchestrated with great precision by Jennifer Bliss.



The visitors loved the event: and the cake stall soon sold out. By midday the raffle drawn and visitors began drifting away. The event raised over £800 in just two hours! And then, as if by magic, everything disappeared and the museum opened as normal at 2 pm. Aren’t our volunteers wonderful!

*John Claxton*

## Exhibitions

**In the future.....**next year will see two exciting exhibitions in the Local History Room. The first is an exhibition titled "**The Woollen Cloth Trade**" and is a joint research project between Topsham Museum and Tuckers Hall, Exeter. This exciting exhibition reflects a very significant time in the town’s history when, at its height in the 1700s, the woollen cloth trade from Topsham was of National importance. Following that there will be project called "**Mapping Topsham**" where you will be invited to prepare a new illustrated map of Topsham or one of its streets. It is a wide ranging project and we anticipate it will produce a fascinating exhibition.

2014 will be the 250th anniversary of establishing **Topsham Maine** so we will also feature this connection.

**and the past.....** The Vivien Leigh exhibition has produced a large visitor response and we have welcomed many people with memories of her films and plays. Last week the curator of Film and Media from the V&A also visited. Also popular has been a textile exhibition titled “Coast” in the Tea Room. During September and October there will be an exhibition of paintings for sale in the tea room, including many of the estuary and the town.

## ACQUISITIONS

During an exciting summer the museum has acquired a painting of the Duke of Monmouth, which is relevant not only to his visit to Topsham and the naming of streets after him but also as a forerunner to the history of the period house.

We have also been given a magnificent, newly made model of *HMS Terror*. Built in Topsham, the boat has a fascinating history and we will be displaying its history in the Sail Loft, together with the model, next year.

*Rachel Nichols*

## Volunteers needed!

The work for the 2013 exhibitions has been considerable but they have been a tremendous success. It is therefore no surprise that Rachel Nichols would love some more help to run them in future. It is very rewarding. If any member would like to help in any way do please get in touch with us.

*John Dunsford*



## E-Newsletter

Once again, this e-newsletter has been sent electronically to members with email addresses. Please could you inform us of any email address changes so that we can keep our records up to date.

If you prefer only to receive an electronic copy in future please email us. This initiative will save both paper and funds.

Members without email addresses will of course continue to receive a printed copy delivered to their home address.

## Forthcoming Events

- ◆ **12th September**— Heritage Day, Museum open from 1000-1200 and 1400-1700
- ◆ **17th September**—**Members only event** - Quiz Evening at the Museum, 1900-2100
- ◆ **25th September**—Lunchtime Lecture “Art, Archaeology and the Pebblebeds”, Speaker: Jill Cobley 1100 for 1130
- ◆ **25th October**—Screening of “That Hamilton Woman” starring Vivien Leigh. Matthews Hall, 1930. Tickets from the Museum or the Topsham Bookshop £5 per person
- ◆ **30th October**—Lunchtime Lecture “Devon Ghosts—a tour of Devon’s most haunted places”, Speaker: Robert Hesketh 1100 for 1130
- ◆ **31st October**—Museum closes
- ◆ **21st November** - Christmas Market, Matthews Hall, 1000-1200.
- ◆ **21st November**— Oboussier Lecture: “Devon's artistic legacy - 200 years of creative inspiration “ Speaker: Professor Sam Smiles , Matthews Hall, 1845 for 1900



### Film Evening at Matthews Hall, 25th October

You will probably have realised by now that it is the 2013 centenary of Vivien Leigh’s birth!

This black and white film was made in 1941 and is set in the Napoleonic Wars. It tells the story of Emma Hamilton (*Vivien Leigh*), a courtesan, who married Sir William Hamilton (*Alan Mowbray*), British Ambassador to the Kingdom of Naples. Emma became the mistress of Admiral Horatio Nelson (*Laurence Olivier*).

The doors will open at 7 p.m. to allow you plenty of time to have a glass or two of wine and the film starts at 7.30 p.m.

Tickets are £5 each (no concessions) can be purchased in advance from the Museum Shop during opening hours or from the Topsham Bookshop.

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