

Newsletter

MARCH 2016



1986 - 2016

Already the 2016 season is upon us and everyone has been working hard to ensure it is a memorable one. Not only is it a Secret Gardens year but it is the 30th anniversary of the foundation of the Museum in its present form. What a marvellous achievement!

I am writing this in early February. Rain water is penetrating the Sailloft windows but, thankfully, all is being well handled by the Maintenance and Sailloft Teams. At the same time, a project on storage space has been going on which has revealed a number of surprising hiding places, piles of stuff to be thrown away and a realisation that there is more space in the cellar than we had thought.



John proposing a Vote of Thanks!

I do want to thank Naomi Cleaver, the designer who gave us her ideas for the future of the Museum. Their impact has been far-reaching and will play an important role in our forward thinking.

We open the Season with a major World War I exhibition 'War comes to Topsham', based on the amazing research by Rosemary Hatch and Marian Grimshaw showing how Topsham and its citizens were affected by the War, not only in Europe but throughout the world. They have also produced a booklet which will soon be available. Amongst the conservation work done over the winter is the refurbishment of the doll's house in the Sailloft. Well worth a look!

Do come and enjoy the season in the Museum and in the gardens and thank you for your valuable and much appreciated support. I look forward to seeing you at the AGM on **Tuesday 12th April**.

John Dunsford

Early Diary Dates For 2016

Saturday 26th March
MUSEUM OPENS
2pm - 5pm

Tuesday 12th April
TMS AGM
6pm

Tuesday 26th April
First Lunchtime Lecture
10.45 for 11.30am

Monday 2nd May
Dawn Chorus with children
5am

Thursday 12th May
'Museums at Night'
Topsham Museum
30 years on
6pm - 8pm

Tuesday 31st May
Second Lunchtime Lecture
10.45 for 11.30am

Who's Who of Volunteers

TEAROOM CONTACT

Jennifer Bliss
873440

SHOP

Judy Wood Rogers
874641

GROUP BOOKINGS

Kathy Morris
873839

VOLUNTEER CO ORDINATOR

Michael Norman
879808

SECRETARY

Jan Betteridge
876339



Topsham Museum Society Annual General Meeting 2016

You should have just received the formal Notice and Agenda for this year's AGM which will be held at 6p.m. on Tuesday **12th April** at the Museum.

Jan Betteridge and Sheila Stephens will have completed their current term of three years as Secretary and Trustee respectively. In addition there are three further vacancies for Trustees. Therefore, in 2016, the Secretary and up to five Trustees can be elected. Both Jan and Sheila have indicated their willingness to stand for re-election. If you have any nominations for Secretary or Trustee please complete the form attached to the Notice. If you would like any information about the role of a Trustee at Topsham Museum please do contact the Chairman (John Dunsford) or me, the Secretary. We will do our best to answer your questions.

We are also proposing that a slight amendment be made to the Constitution to allow members to elect to receive official notes of meetings by e-mail. Currently, the Constitution states that members must receive formal notice in writing. The more members who are happy to receive electronic communications the more savings in money and volunteer time and effort we can make.

We will have a short presentation after the event on a subject of interest to our members.

Jan Betteridge

Exhibitions 2016

Exhibitions form an important part of the Museum's activities, enabling research work to be carried out and items from our archives to be put on display; they also attract visitors who might not otherwise have chosen to come to the Museum.

'War Comes to Topsham' is the result of two years of meticulous research by our family history team, Rosemary Hatch and Marian Grimshaw. They have investigated the families of all those who served during World War I from Topsham and have some amazing stories of Topsham men in far-flung corners of the world.



The exhibition explores the social and economic life of the town through the background of the combatants and, on the home front, tells the stories of the VAD hospital, women bell-ringers, allotments and fund-raising events, extracted from school

records, newspapers, letters and diaries.

We are grateful to the Heritage Lottery Fund which has funded the research and displays and also enabled Rosemary and Marian to visit the National Archives in Kew to source records not available locally or online.



The exhibition runs from **26th March** to the end of July. Stories from the research are being used by Estuary Players for their autumn play, details of which will be in the next Newsletter.



This biennial event is a huge source of funds for the Museum. It is also a fun day looking at gardens, exploring the town and meeting friends all bent on the same activity of seeing other people's gardens and consuming tea and cakes!

The plant stall in the Museum garden is happy to accept interesting plants and most of the Museum volunteers are involved in some way with the event.

Programmes will be available from the end of May both online and through the Museum and we would be delighted if you would come to explore Topsham and promote the Museum.

Tracing your Ancestors at the Museum

Members can use the Museum's subscription for *Findmypast* free of charge on the computer in the Local History Room — either by appointment or during Museum opening hours. Family historians will be interested to learn that from Tuesday 16 February the 1939 Register is now included in the subscription. This is the closest thing to an England and Wales census between the 1921 Census (which won't be released until 2022) and the 1951 Census (hidden until at least 2052) and it offers a chance for you to discover more about people you knew personally, whether relatives, friends or neighbours.

Rosemary Hatch



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One of our most successful exhibitions in recent years was on **'Salmon Fishing'** and we are going to reprise the display boards in the Entwistle Room for visitors to enjoy – and maybe they will also see one of the salmon boats working on the Exe during the season. 'Salmon Fishing' will run to the end of July.

30th Anniversary — 2016 is the 30th anniversary of the Museum run by the Topsham Museum Society. During April and May the tea-room will have a display of the work carried out since 1983 to enable the building to be used as a Museum and the developments since that date.



The second major exhibition following **'War Comes to Topsham'** is entitled **'Topsham Shops and Shopping'**, using many oral history recollections as well as census information, photographs, newspaper advertisements and even printed paper bags to trace the history of some of the buildings in Fore Street and High Street.

Also later in the season we have an art exhibition, **'Black and White'**, in the tea-room, for visitors to see the varied woodcuts produced by artists Hester Holman and Barbara Vincent and other contemporaries.

Rachel Nichols

Publications

The Publications team has been working hard on a booklet to accompany this year's major exhibition, **'War Comes to Topsham'** and we hope, printers permitting, to have it ready for the beginning of the season.

Our researchers have discovered an amazing amount of interesting family history as well as a great deal of evidence of the effect the Great War had on the home front. So many lives were affected, from the May family who had nine members in the Services, to children missing school to work for up to six hours a day harvesting fruit from the market gardens in town. School records describe pupils as being 'tired and listless' and even after the War ended they showed an 'innocent restlessness and want of application', having been used to lenient war-time conditions. If you would like to know more, the 24-page booklet will be available from the Museum or to purchase through our website at £2-50 a copy, plus postage.

Work on the 2016 *Topsham Times* is also under way, as well as a 'Topsham Walks' booklet and another on 'Topsham in the Twenties' featuring the boyhood memories of Roy Wheeler and Morice Parsons, from tape recordings made by Bernard Lane in the 1980s. We welcome volunteers with experience of, or an interest in, all aspects of publishing, as well as articles of original research related to the history of Topsham. Please contact me via e-mail at c.maguire@ex.ac.uk if you would like to find out more.

Cathy Maguire



Museum Doll's House

The Sailloft displays a fascinating doll's house made by Mr Beavis in 1860; it is in fact a model of Weir House, now the Exeter Golf and Country Club.

Mr Beavis lived in Topsham and was the estate carpenter for the Duckworth family. The house was given to the Museum in 1985 by Mrs Duckworth-Bradshaw and renovated. Some of the furniture was supplied by Top Hat Furnishers of Exeter, and over the years items have been added by Society members.

This past winter Mr Peter Grinyer has been rewiring the lighting in the house and this meticulous and fiddly job has now been completed. The new lighting makes a huge difference to seeing each room and will intrigue both adult visitors and children in 2016.



Peter Grinyer at work!

Please note!

An electronic version of this newsletter will be sent to all members with e-mail addresses.

Please inform us if you change your e-mail address. If you would prefer not to receive a paper copy in future please tell us.

This initiative saves both paper and funds.

Members without e-mail addresses will of course continue to receive a printed copy.



Lunchtime Lectures

Coffee served in Riverside Gallery from 10.45

Lectures start at 11.30 am

TUESDAY 26th APRIL **The Inland Waterways of England and Wales**

Bernard Hughes has been a canal enthusiast since 1974 and has travelled over 2000 miles of the English and Welsh canal system.

TUESDAY 31st MAY

Devon during World War 1

Dr David Parker, local historian and author of several books will highlight the complexity of the local war effort and the controversies surrounding Devon farmers' response to the war.

This will complement and expand on our major 2016 exhibition, 'War Comes to Topsham'

TUESDAY 28th JUNE **Finds from Shipwrecks in Devon**

Charlotte Coles: Archaeologist

TUESDAY 26th JULY **The Seaton Down Hoard**

Thomas Cadbury:
Royal Albert Memorial Museum

No lecture in August

TUESDAY 27th SEPTEMBER **Ernest Shackleton and the James Caird – 100 years ago**

Prof Herbert Macgregor:
Academic and yachtsman

TUESDAY 25th OCTOBER **Topsham's Shops - Then and Now**

Mark Dant: Topsham Museum &
Liz Hodges: Route 2 Bike Shop

News from the Planning Group

Last October we ran an experiment using the old front door as the visitor entrance and reversing the route through the building. The objective had been to put more emphasis on the period house, which is one of our key exhibits, and we feel we were successful in that regard. However, the reverse flow caused a number of practical problems and we consider that the cost of overcoming them would not be justified. That is not to say that the proposal might not be revisited one day, but for the foreseeable future we revert to the arrangements in place before last October. We are most grateful to all who were involved in the experiment and to those who provided us with their comments and ideas.

We are currently looking at other ways in which we could improve the presentation of the period house and are in discussion with Henry Lindsay, the Museum designer who did much of the design work in the Sailloft and the River Gallery. We don't envisage anything terribly radical, but do feel there are things we could do to make it more interesting for visitors; and at the end of the day that's what it's all about! Any changes we make are unlikely to take effect until the beginning of the 2017 season.

One change you will see when you come to the Museum is a new reception desk. Attractive though it is, the current desk takes up a lot of room and we have often wished we could move it out of the way for lectures or events; so we are going to replace it with a smaller desk which will be mobile and will give us much more flexibility. The replacement desk and will be in place for the beginning of the new season.

Anthony Jennings

Membership Matters

Without you, our members, Topsham Museum would not exist. We value your support, whether it be spreading the word about the Museum, participating in our Annual General Meeting or contributing your time as a volunteer. We continue to have almost 400 members, which is impressive, but I wonder if we could aim for more? Do you have friends or neighbours who have yet to discover what a gem we have at the heart of our community in Topsham? I'm sure if you got them down to the Museum, you would earn their thanks!

On a more mundane matter, membership subscriptions will become due on 1st April. Many of you pay by bank standing order and therefore need to take no action. But for those who pay annually by cash or cheque, may I ask you please to complete the renewal form included with this Newsletter. If you have any queries regarding your membership subscription.

Please don't hesitate to contact me, either by telephone (873927) or to the Museum's e-mail (info@topshamMuseum.org.uk)

Anthony Jennings

