

# The Museletter

July/August 2014



## Our town: past and future

The Museum's summer exhibition – Bradford at War 1914-18 – was held in the Library meeting room from 4-24 August. It attracted considerable interest and many plaudits from those who visited.

For me, it was the stories of the people who died that were most poignant. On display was a letter to the parents of a young soldier, from his employers Messrs Spencer Moulton, written on hearing the news of his death. It was hand-written, in beautifully crafted English, and expressed with eloquent simplicity the sincerity of the firm's condolences. It was a very touching document and it moves me even now to think about it. It highlighted the value of ordinary, as well as extraordinary, people's lives.

The museum is fortunate to have a team of highly skilled people who are able to collect appropriate artefacts and put them together to form a very valuable testament about how the First World War affected our local population. They deserve our congratulations.

Holy Trinity Church is undergoing a process of re-ordering, which has required some investigation into what might lie beneath the floor of the chancel and within the grounds of

the churchyard. Some excavation work has taken place by the appointed archaeologists, to assess the depth of burials and where drainage pipes might be laid – the church did suffer ingress of water last winter. This work is not being carried out by Roy and his enthusiastic team of archaeologists, who have been concentrating on further digs in the area of Barton Farm this August. No significant finds have been reported from the Holy Trinity Church dig so far but, if they are, we shall let you know.

The Museum has commissioned the writing of a Prospectus, which will be used to support our quest to find larger, more suitable premises for our museum. As well as giving a brief overview of the Museum's history, it will set out our vision for a museum of the future. One element of this, will be to seek the views of people on what they want to see in a new museum. The consultation will take place over the coming months, but do start thinking now about this very important aspect. It will be too late once building starts!

*Mervyn Harris*  
Chairman

## A timely gift

While waiting to open the other day, the Hon. Curator looked at a bucket on display and pondered on why the Museum didn't have a yoke in its collection – the wooden contraption that rested on the shoulders, designed to carry two buckets, usually of milk. They were common pieces of equipment on the farm – especially in the dairy, and are associated in popular culture with milkmaids. However, they were used for many carrying jobs by other people.

It was barely an hour later when, with a clanking of chains like Marley's ghost, in came David Stokes carrying exactly that article! It had been used by Ernie Chard, who farmed Barton Farm before it became a tourist attraction. David also had with him a milking stool from the same source, another item that had been missing from the Museum.

There are other agricultural tools we would like to have, but they must be from the Bradford area and we have to draw the line at tractors, threshing machines and combine harvesters!

*Roger Clark*  
Hon Curator

## Why are we digging up Bradford on Avon?

As the second community dig comes to a close, Museum Trustee Roy Canham looks at some of the questions about the town's early history that may be answered by continuing archaeological research.

In the last edition of the Museletter we looked at some of the results of our first dig, to the east of the Tithe Barn. During August, we have been doing more work in the same area – but why do we want to dig at all?

Early Bradford is a bit of a mystery. If you look for ancient settlements upstream along the banks of the Avon, there is plenty to find. The river runs through Wiltshire from Sherston past Malmesbury, Chippenham and Melksham. Along that route wide gravel terraces have formed and aerial survey reveals prehistoric and Roman activity all the way. See the photo of Iron Age hut sites close to the river between Melksham and Bradford. So we might expect similar archaeology on our river bank in Bradford. Nothing so far but more on that later.

The next part of this tale is the Roman villa found some years ago at St Laurence School. It's not generally known that there is a lot more

Roman archaeology on the high ground above the town, including Budbury, indicating a big zone of settlement activity. Now the Romans were efficient engineers and it's unlikely that they simply ignored the River Avon and stuck to the high plateau. Yet the only evidence of Roman riverside activity is a small piece of sculpture portraying Celtic goddesses, found built into a wall in St Margaret's Street.

A third element of the mystery was outlined in the recent Discussion Group talk by Martyn Whittock. In essence there was activity here, both urban and ecclesiastical, through much of the Saxon period (AD 450 – 1066). We have an incredible survival in the form of St Laurence chapel, but note that it dates from the end of this time, around AD 1000, and it's all we have. Not a sherd of Saxon pottery, not a coin.

It's intriguing to look at the results of excavations carried out in Trowbridge before the

Shires was built. The objective was to find the remains of Trowbridge Castle but the outcome revealed three phases of Anglo-Saxon settlement predating the building of the anarchy period castle. Surely Bradford must have the same potential?

So what's the problem? First we see very little new building in the town, for the obvious reason that most of its buildings are listed and valued. Therefore there is little opportunity for archaeological excavation – or even holes in the ground to look down into!

Another factor is that interest has tended to focus on the area around Church Street and Holy Trinity, no doubt based on the location of our Saxon chapel. However, there is a problem here: looking downstream from the town bridge, Church Street is on our right bank. If the Saxon activity was clustered on this side, they were

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# What's On

from August 2014

## Discussion Group

First Wednesday of the month, 7.30pm

The Museum's Discussion Group continues to cover a wide range of subjects. Since the last Museletter, we have had sessions on the results of our Community Dig, and an introduction to Wiltshire archaeology, led by Roy Canham, and on the beginning of History (or, Anglo-Saxon Bradford!), led by Martyn Whittock.

The meetings take place on the first Wednesday of each month at 7.30pm in the Library Meeting Room, and are FREE to members. Non-members can attend one session before being asked to join. If you know of someone who isn't a member, do bring them along – it's a great introduction to the Museum.

As this Museletter goes to press, the topic for the October session is yet to be confirmed, but this meeting will go ahead as planned. Once the topic is confirmed updated details will be posted on the website, Facebook and Twitter, and emailed around to all members on email.

Upcoming sessions confirmed so far are as follows:

### WEDNESDAY 3 SEPTEMBER

**Roman Bathing – a Pancea?** led by Laura Mountford

### WEDNESDAY 1 OCTOBER

**Topic to be confirmed**

### WEDNESDAY 5 NOVEMBER

**'The Cradle of English Geology'** led by Roger Clark

### WEDNESDAY 3 DECEMBER

**An Overview of the Archaeology of the Bradford Hundred** led by Roy Canham

In order to continue providing sessions on wide range of topics in 2015, we need your help! If you would like to suggest a topic, or would like to offer to lead a session, please contact Kate Turnbull (Museum Trustee) on 01225 866328 or at [turnbullke@googlemail.com](mailto:turnbullke@googlemail.com)

## Briefly ...

We are planning to have a stall at the annual St Laurence School Street Party in Church Street on Saturday 27 September.

We will have portable objects on display, pottery sherds, Museum information and our publications. We want to raise our profile in the community, but to do this we need your help!

If you could spare an hour or two to help run the stall at this event, please contact Kate Turnbull (Museum Trustee) on 01225 866328 or at [turnbullke@googlemail.com](mailto:turnbullke@googlemail.com)

To assist the many genealogists who are cultivating their family trees, the Museum now has indexes of baptisms and burials in Bradford from 1566 to 1837. This is, of course, Bradford *sensu lato* – including Atworth Major, Holt, Limpley Stoke, Winsley and Wraxall. The indexes have been compiled by members of the Wiltshire Family History Society.

The Bradford on Avon Millennium Embroidery has been exhibited in Bath this summer, for two weeks at the beginning of August. It was displayed at the Quaker Meeting House in York Street, alongside the world-renowned Quaker Tapestry. It's now back in Bradford, and will go on show next summer in the Library Meeting Room.

## Record attendance for Anglo-Saxon talk

We had a record turnout of 35 for our July Discussion Group session, led by Martyn Whittock, and provocatively entitled "Anglo-Saxon Bradford on Avon: the beginning of History!"

Martyn's justification for the title is that until the Anglo-Saxon period, Bradford's inhabitants are nameless and voiceless, and it is not until this point that we have names, identities and stories.

He talked us through the Battle of Bradford on Avon, looked at local place names, discussed Aldhelm's monastery and the Saxon Church, and rounded off with a look at Bradford on Avon in the Domesday Book, which gives an insight into Bradford at the end of the Saxon period.

Martyn's enthusiasm for the subject, together with his dynamic style, made for a very interesting and informative evening.

### Museum trustees:

**John Banks:** 863134  
**Roy Canham:** 866748  
**Chris Dale** (Hon Treasurer): 862198  
**Mervyn Harris** (Hon Chairman): 863440  
**Sophie Hawke:** 863934  
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**Gill Winfield:** 868179

**Roger Clark** (Hon Curator): 865785  
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**Joceline Bury** (PR & Newsletter): 867348

## Why are we digging up Bradford?

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clinging to the face of steep cliff, and certainly short on space for expansion.

Look over to the left bank and we have Barton Farm and the Tithe Barn located on a wide river terrace: just the sort of location that is favoured for settlement throughout prehistory and later periods.

Had this terrace been arable land in recent time, producing cropmarks like the rest of the Avon valley, we might have some valuable insights into Bradford's development. But it is

by good fortune undeveloped, open ground on which we might conduct geophysics surveys and follow up with excavations. It's an exciting opportunity – and the results of the latest dig will be posted on the website and in the next edition of the Museletter.

In the meantime, if you are interested in joining us in further community digs, please let me know.

*Roy Canham*  
Trustee

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