

Bradford on Avon Museum

The *Museletter*



May / June 2015

www.bradfordonavonmuseum.co.uk

Chairman's Notes

Chris Dale outlined at our March AGM some of the financial challenges the museum faces in this and subsequent years. As a small museum with limited resources, any increase in outgoings, in this case our overheads for occupying the Museum and Silver Street premises, can have a disproportionate effect on our balance sheet. However, the good news is that we expect our income to increase this year. Proceeds from 2015 Secret Gardens' ticket sales have been generously pledged to the museum; providing teas will generate further money; museum publications have shown good growth; and the response from the proposal at the AGM to raise subscription levels has been very positive. Thanks to everyone for your support.

Support will be needed for the following museum events this summer: Secret Gardens teas 28 June, and Trinity Church Street Fair 4 July. These aim to increase our membership, raise funds and highlight the important Iron Duke project. Further details are in this *Museletter*.

Stewarding features in this edition. It is essential that the museum is kept open during our advertised hours. Our steward numbers need constant replenishing. We have a very loyal band of volunteers but we sometimes struggle to keep open because of a disproportionate reliance on a few volunteers to steward for more sessions each year, and especially at weekends & Bank Holidays. Do call in at the Library and sign up to help, or contact the stewards' organisers (details on page 2). Also, do think about inviting someone you know to consider becoming a steward, and suggest they come for an introductory session. They just might enjoy it!

We hope to bring back a restored Iron Duke to Bradford this year. It is proving quite a challenge. There are lots of strands to pull together, not least of which is managing the project and funding it. We are fortunate in having the Preservation Trust as a partner, with their past expertise in managing large projects. It is important that momentum on this project is maintained, but if hitches arise which prevent us achieving our goal this year, then there is always 2016.

Mervyn Harris

Iron Duke Project

What do you know about the Iron Duke? Have you read about it or looked it up on our website? Do you know why we are planning to bring a huge metal 'mangle', weighing over 12 tons, back to Bradford on Avon? The task is a significant challenge and the Heritage Lottery Fund, which we hope will provide us with a grant, would like to know what museum members and supporters think about the project. Are you excited by the prospect of seeing it back here, whence it came? Would you like to get involved with getting it here, or do you know someone who might be? Would you like to research the history of the rubber industry, or help to plan a 'discovery tour' on rubber manufacturing in our town?

Do get in touch with your thoughts and views, hopes and concerns. Your feedback is valuable, yes valuable. Your views could help us secure more funding, as well as provide opportunities for involvement in a quite unique project and education for others.

Email: meeharris@icloud.com or phone me on 01225-863440.

Mervyn Harris

What's On

Community Dig 2015 – another chance to try your hand at archaeology!

We plan to return to Hen Field near the tithe barn to explore further some of the 2014 discoveries. Planned dates are **27 June - 1 July** and **4 - 8 July** working 9.30 – 4.30. If you are interested in digging, or are willing to help greet visitors as before, please let me know dates when you are available. ALL WELCOME!

Roy Canham 01225 866748 roycanham@btinternet.com

Secret Gardens – Sunday 31st May, and Sunday 28th June

Do support the Museum by coming along to one of the Secret Gardens events (see Chairman's Notes above). We will also be providing teas at Kingston Place on 28th June to raise money for the Museum. If you are able to volunteer to either bake cakes in advance or serve the teas on the day, please get in touch.

Mervyn Harris 01225 863440 meeharris@icloud.com

Trinity Church Street Fair – Saturday 4th July

We will again have a stand in Westbury Gardens at this event. If you would like to volunteer to 'man' the stand for an hour on the day, please let me know.

Kate Turnbull 01225 866328 turnbullke@googlemail.com

Be part of Bradford's history: We urgently need More Volunteer Stewards

You all know our wonderful Museum, but have you ever thought of helping us keep it open?

We have 6000 visitors a year, from near and far. For many visitors our main 'wow factor' exhibit is Miss Christopher's chemist shop, relocated in its entirety from Silver Street to the museum in 1990, when the library opened. But in addition, curator Roger Clark has created numerous themed displays which tell the story of our town from pre-Roman times to the present day. Many visitors often do not know the first thing about our town and like to discuss our displays with the steward. So Stewarding becomes a stimulating, interactive experience.

We aim to be open virtually all year round, from Wednesday to Sunday, but in order to keep the museum open, we rely entirely on our relatively small team of loyal volunteer stewards – and we now urgently need to recruit new stewards, to help spread the workload and to cater for the passing of time causing some long-term stewards to

now be able to do less than they once did. If we cannot expand the steward team, we will not be able to open as often as we have done in the past, so we do hope that you or someone you know might be able to help.

Stewarding provides an excellent opportunity to learn more about the Bradford Hundred and its remarkable history, and to share that knowledge with visitors from all over the world, as well as from the local area. You don't need to make a huge commitment: we open for two two-hour sessions – 10.30am-12.30pm and 2pm-4pm – from Wednesday to Saturday, plus Sunday afternoons. Some people prefer to do one or more regular weekly, fortnightly or monthly sessions, others are happy to fill in as and when needed. Full training is given, and we also hold monthly coffee morning socials at The Swan – a great chance to meet up, chat and swap ideas.

Stewarding is great fun: it's wonderful to see (and hear) the reactions of first-time visitors as they come into Miss Christopher's!

We are already experiencing days this year when the Museum cannot be open due to lack of available stewards, so we would be grateful for any help you can give.

If you're interested in supporting the museum by volunteering as a steward, please contact Gillian King – gkingbearfield@googlemail.com – or Joceline Bury – jocelinebury@me.com. We would be delighted to hear from you. You can also find out more at our website: www.bradfordonavonmuseum.co.uk

We will also be running a stall at the Volunteers' Day in St Margaret's Hall on Sunday 7 June, when the museum will be open from noon until 4pm and any would-be stewards will be able to have a look round, meet current stewards and find out more about the museum.

Joceline Bury and Peter Mann

Romans In Bradford?

Most of you will recall the discovery of a Roman villa at St Laurence School some 15 years ago. This building sits high above the town, and was probably the centre for a huge agricultural estate. Our Lidar survey in 2013 revealed a mass of ancient fields stretching westwards from the edge of the town to Winsley and Monkton Farleigh.

But what happened down by the river? It's barely conceivable that the Romans ignored the Avon. This river flows past good farmland throughout its Wiltshire section, land showing much evidence of Roman activity. Water transport is more efficient than road haulage, provided the river is cleared and maintained - work regularly undertaken in the Roman period – and transport of grain to the European mainland was of high priority.

The evidence is hard to come by. First, any town with a long Saxon and Medieval history keeps its early secrets well buried. Second, in a steep-sided valley, deep deposits build up rapidly and add to the mystery. One of our

exhibits is the small relief of Celtic deities found in a building in St Margaret's Street, and presumably from a Romano-British shrine. In a recent dig near the tithe barn two masonry fragments – a stone from an arch and a piece of a column – are most likely to represent a Roman building located somewhere on the river bank near the town. There is little else save for one Roman coin of Nero found near the bridge. Perhaps some more digging more produce the goods?

Roy Canham



Museum trustees:

Roy Canham: 866748
Chris Dale (Hon Treasurer): 862198
Mervyn Harris (Hon Chairman): 863440
Sophie Hawke: 863934
Peter Mann: 865967
Ivor Slcombe: 862525
Kate Turnbull (Membership): 866328
Gill Winfield: 868179

Additional office holders:

John Banks (Vice President)
Doreen Ellis (Vice President)
Roger Clark (Hon Curator): 865785
Joceline Bury (PR): 867348

Stewards' Organisers:

Mary Clark: 865785
Gillian King: 866387