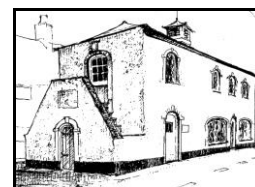


Watchet Market House Museum

Newsletter



SUMMER 2024

No. 29

The Royal Society 'Places of Science' Grant

At last we have been given the green light to prepare an exhibition on board the mv Balmoral. She has just come out of dry dock, after being laid up since 2017. It is hoped she will sail the Bristol Channel again in 2025.



Earlier this year we were invited to apply for a grant from the Royal Society 'Places of Science' project, which

seeks to help small museums all over the country, and we were successful. The award from the Royal Society set the wheels in motion for us, in collaboration with the Balmoral Trust, to curate an exhibition 'Waving at Watchet', exploring our historical links with Bristol.

The tides of the Bristol Channel are among the highest and strongest in the world and provide ample material to cover the science aspect of the project. The Severn Estuary has provided the means to trade as far back as the 10th century when the Vikings were on the loose.

Bristol City Docks and Watchet harbour would not exist without the tides.

The exhibition will run from early August through until 9 September 2024 on board the ship, at Prince's Wharf, Bristol City Docks. It will also involve 'My Future, My Choice' an education service for schools and communities that enables young people to go places out of their normal zone. Day trips to Watchet are also planned for disadvantaged families.

Curator's Choice

The Viking ship model we have was donated to the Museum in 1988, by Mr I C Reynolds, from Cornwall.



It is a fine scale model of the original clinker-built Oseberg, discovered in 1904 in Norway, which was restored using 90% of the original wood, and was believed to be a ceremonial ship for a

chieftain. Watchet's connection to the Vikings is well documented, the settlement being raided three times



during the 10th century, when silver pennies from the local mint were the main prize, the last raid being 988 AD. These coins can be found in museums in Stockholm and Copenhagen.

A re-enactment of this was celebrated in 1988 when the Esplanade was packed with onlookers watching the raiders attempt to ransack the town for a fourth time!!.



Few artefacts remain of the Viking period, but our model is a reminder of those dangerous times – and now we play them at football!

Viking raiders' by Squadron Ldr R.R. Wheel

A Special Visitor

In June a very excited lady and her husband entered the Museum. Jackie Cleveland (see picture) is the daughter of the late Bernard Briggs, who was an evacuee housed with Mr Harry Wells and his wife Gussie at Causway Terrace. He loved his time in Watchet and especially the alabaster church sculpted by Harry. More astonishing is the fact that Harry only had one hand as the other had been damaged in an accident at Wansbrough Paper Mill.



Jackie Cleveland (nee Briggs)

The fine alabaster church is one of the Museum's prized exhibits, made from local, red-tinged alabaster. In 1939 Harry gave the church to Bernard Briggs. He died in 1999 and willed it back to Watchet and the Museum, through 'Gussie' Wells and Bernard's family. The church is displayed in the Museum.

Seaweed (kelp, sea wrack, ore weed)

The cottage industry of burning seaweed to create kelp ash (soda ash) to supply Bristol glass makers was established for over 500 years at Watchet. Great quantities were sent by Watchet ships to Bristol, where the ash was needed to bring down the melting point of sand and transform it into glass using mixed alkali (sodium and potassium), two parts kelp to one of sand.



There is substantial evidence for the use of kelp ash in glass manufacture until the 1830s and Bristol was foremost in this industry. The Watchet area had seaweed in great abundance on its beaches and country

people would rake it together during the summer, like hay, turning it so that it dried sufficiently to burn, the ash produced being exported.

In the middle of the 19th century, seaweed ash was no longer burnt as sodium carbonate (salt) was used instead.

Help! More stewards are needed

Gill and Gay work tirelessly to ensure the Museum can open 6 days a week and on those days when no steward is available – guess who stands in to fill those gaps? Anyone who would like an induction (utterly painless) and can spare a couple of hours meeting interesting people – then we need you. Please ring Gill on 01984 634001.

Stewards' Outing

This year, as a reward to our loyal volunteer stewards we are arranging a day outing to Sherborne. Sherborne is a picturesque small town, just over the border into Dorset, with a wealth of history, fine art venues and individual owned shops and cafes.



The Abbey (above), is worth a visit, as is the Visitor Information Point, while the Museum close by is a must if you wish to uncover more about the town in times gone by. *The Sherborne* is a new art gallery with a difference and two castles, - the new and the old - providing more for the history buffs.

Our bus will depart from Watchet at the usual places on Friday 18th October at 9.15 pm and we expect to return to Watchet by 5.30 pm.

For members wishing to go it will be £12 pp. but please bear in mind that stewards get priority and members will be able to go on a first-come basis, only.

Winter Talks Programme 2024/2025

2024

9 October Talk by **Mary Siraut** (SW Heritage Centre)

“Queen Victoria to Queen Elizabeth II:

The Victoria County History of Somerset”

13 November Talk by **Tom Mayberry**

“Discovering the Churches of West Somerset”

11 December Talk by **Vicky Dawson**

“Smashed in a cellar in Wells”

How a collection of pottery can throw light on the history of a house

2025

8 January Talk by **Adrian Webb**

“Churchill’s Secret Chart Makers”

12 February Talk by **Rob Wilson-North**

“Exmoor’s Archaeology”

12 March **ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING** and presentation of accounts,

followed by a talk by **Tim Hill**

“Outdoor Music in Somerset”

STOP PRESS!!

The Museum has a NEW telephone

The number is – 07395 482859

This is a mobile as the landline has been disconnected.

Please follow the instructions, which are displayed in the stewards’ file.

Committee Members

Chairman/Curator: Jim Nicholas 01984 631660

Membership Secretary: Gill Williams 01984 634001

Assistant Curator: Keith Sullivan 01984 639908

Treasurer: Peter Murphy 01984 639261

Secretary: Sue Upstone 01984 639478

Dot Amery, Hugh Amery, Gay Chilcott, Sara Long and Molly Quint. Jonathan Westcott - consultant.

Visitor numbers for the season to the end of July 2024

Total 14,089 (including children 1,919). The children’s quiz is very popular. Have you tried it yet?

The Visitors’ Book in the Museum makes for interesting reading, with positive comments from visitors from all over the world, which is very rewarding. Our little gem of a town is still attracting interest and long may it last.

The Lease and re-Accreditation

Finally we have agreed, via Watchet Town Council, a new lease for the Market House and we can proceed with our accreditation renewal, which was received in early July. This gives us 6 months to submit our papers. Much of the preparation work has already been done so we are hoping to be able to complete and send in the necessary documents before Christmas.

*Photos: Watchet Market House Museum
unless specified otherwise*