

**Welcome** to Wells & Mendip Museum's newsletter with information about exhibitions, talks, events and developments at the Museum. If you would like to receive a copy by e-mail please contact [admin@wellsmuseum.org.uk](mailto:admin@wellsmuseum.org.uk)

**Opening hours: Tuesday – Saturday 10am – 4pm (Closed Sundays & Mondays)**

## **First Floor Exhibition Room**

**4 – 29 June**

### **“Letters Hand Made” The Calligraphy & Lettering Arts Society (CLAS)**

Celebrating their 30th anniversary this is a travelling exhibition of new work by national and international lettering artists.

The exhibition has come from London, and showcases the varied talents of contemporary calligraphers.



The title of the exhibition celebrates the tangible, the analogue and the tactile skills of using pens, inks, paints, brushes or other tools. Scientific studies have proved that the physical act of writing by hand results in a closer understanding and involvement with content.

This is no surprise to lettering artists, who take deep pleasure in creating something beautiful by hand from words, in varying degrees of precision or abstraction.

There will also be a catalogue of all images in the exhibition available to purchase, with postcards of selected images. **Free entry to exhibition only**

**6 July – 7 September**

### **“Out of Time: Underground Mendip” - Herbert E Balch, John Hassall, Ben Rivers, Harry Savory and Emma Stibbon.**

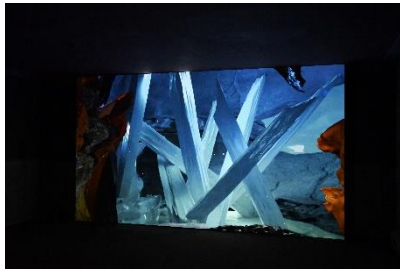
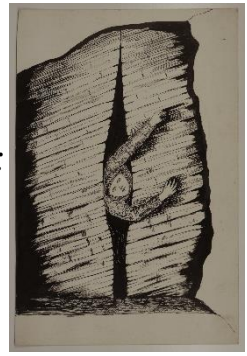
**Curated by Josephine Lanyon.**

Out of Time connects early twentieth-century quests for archaeological and geological knowledge with our current environmental concerns. This exhibition intertwines the pioneering works of Herbert Balch, John Hassall, and Harry Savory, who unravelled the mysteries of Mendip caves, with new contemporary works by Ben Rivers and Emma Stibbon, inspiring us to imagine the future of this subterranean world.



At the heart of the project is a series of black and white pen and ink drawings by the museum's founder, Herbert E Balch, whose motto, Search and Learn, has been lent to a wider heritage-funded programme. Balch's drawings from the 1900s, shown for the first time in this exhibition, result from a relentless

investigation into how the caves have been formed and used by humans for 45,000 years. The documents have an urgency and directness that reflect hours of physical endeavour to pioneer the discovery of Swildon's Hole, Priddy (1901), Eastwater Cavern, Wells (1902) and Wookey Hole (1906). The 1914 publication *Wookey Hole: its Cave and Cave Dwellers* is the culmination of years of research by Herbert Balch in collaboration with the photographer Harry Savory and the graphic artist John Hassall; this book will be displayed alongside examples of the three artists' work and archaeological specimens.



Ben Rivers' film *Look Then Below* and Emma Stibbon's drawing *Resurgence* were both made in response to Wookey Hole caves. Ben Rivers was inspired by William Boyd Dawkins's 1852 research into the palaeolithic archaeology of the Hyaena Den at Wookey Hole Ravine and Jules Verne's 1864 science fiction

novel *Journey to the Centre of the Earth*. The film shows the netherworld of chambers carved out over deep time and foretells a future subterranean world, occupied by a species that evolved from our environmentally challenged world.



Emma Stibbon's monumental monochrome ink drawing reflects on how the forces of nature and human activity have shaped the Show Cave at Wookey Hole. Water pooling from the River Axe has worn away the limestone, while dramatic coloured lighting has encouraged vegetation growth. Stibbon has also produced a series of photographic ambrotypes and drawings of Balch's geological

samples, which connect back to the founder's research. This exhibition is a rare opportunity to focus on the Mendip's unique and changing underground worlds. By fusing the museum's collections with twentieth-century thought, we can examine these very special habitats' past, present, and future. **Museum entry fees apply**



## Ground Floor Meeting Room

### 10 July – 31 August "The Italians of Wells" exhibition



Have you ever wondered why Wells is home to so many Italians? And why we have so many Italian building firms? Did you know Wells had a WW2 Prisoner of War camp? Come to our new exhibition - The Italians of Wells - from 9<sup>th</sup> July to find out more. See genuine POW art, learn about the Romulus and Remus statue, talk to descendants of

those POWs. And think about the differences and similarities between these Italian immigrants and the Ukrainian families staying in Wells today.

**Museum entry fees apply**

**Saturday 1 June 10am – 2pm**

**Museum Garden open day**



An open garden and plant sale event with a wide variety of plants for sale Refreshments will be available outside the lecture hall kitchen.

Proceeds will help to maintain and develop the garden to a standard that earned it a Gold Award for Wells in Bloom in 2023.

Card payments accepted.

Donations are also welcome. **Free entry to event**

## From the Curator

The museum has recently been given a candle holder used by veteran cave explorer Herbert Balch.

The early Mendip Miners used candles for lighting, mounted on wooden wedges wedged into mine walls, and cave explorers also used candles for lighting. Large hand held acetylene carbide lamps were available, but Balch preferred caving by candle-light. He famously reported that "...candles are by common consent the most dependable illuminant, as they cast no treacherous shadows, although electric torches are a good standby..."

Drawings of the time show covers simply holding candles above and in front of them. However, a candle holder was an option. It is designed to be worn hooked onto clothing, probably a woollen pullover or jacket. A cover unfolds to protect the clothing from the flame. At its base is a spring which keeps the candle in place as it burns shorter.

It was given to the donor by William Balch, Herbert Balch's son, and it will go on display in Balch's Study at the museum as soon as possible.



## Search & Learn project

Preparations for our new exhibition *Out of Time* curated by Josephine Lanyon are progressing well. We were delighted to welcome artist Emma Stibbon to the museum to view geology specimens collected by our founder Herbert Balch and a collection of his drawings. Emma has since paid a visit to Wookey Hole and we are looking forward to seeing her new work on display in the museum. The exhibition will open on Saturday 6 July.

We are also developing an exhibition in partnership with the Italian community, which will be on display in the Meeting Room from Tuesday 9 July.

More information on both of these exhibitions can be found above.

**Victoria Northwood, Search & Learn Project Manager**

## Museum Library News

There is little news to report except the continuing need for at least two new Library assistants – preferably on Wednesday or Thursday afternoons.

We have acquired one new book since our last newsletter, namely *A Street through Time 1770-2020* presented by the author C. S. Villiers. The title is similar to the Wells Museum's publication (*The Changing Shops of Wells 1796 -2018* by Eric Preston.) The booklet went out of print but is now available again in the Museum shop at £9.50.

There is another book on the horizon - sent to me from friends in Australia - that will become part of our Captain Cook exhibit shared with Coleridge's *Rime of the Ancient Mariner* and our Albatross. The newly published book that will join the exhibition in due course is *The Endeavour Journals: Captain Cook in Australia* by John and Clare MacDonald.

What is unusual about the book – apart from its maps, illustrations, and photographs of the senior members of the crew – is that the daily journals of Captain Cook himself, the naturalist Joseph Banks, the natural history artist Sydney Parkinson and the Midshipman James Magra are recorded together on the same page at the same time of clock, sun or moon.

I shall arrange in due course for the book to be added to the Coleridge Archive, but kept close at all times to the Library's account of Captain Cook's voyages – after I have read the book first! **Stuart Andrews, Hon. Librarian**

## OTHER EVENTS IN THE MUSEUM

### **Saturday 8th June 2024 19:30 - 21:30 – “Revealing the Undiscovered Cosmos”**

In person and online, guest speaker Peter Goodhew FRAS.

Peter is part of an international team of amateurs using a network of robotic telescopes to reveal hitherto unseen parts of the cosmos. He will explain how amateurs are finding new cosmic objects and will reveal some of the most interesting and unusual discoveries of the past three years.

Peter has been photographing deep space since 2015 from two observatories, one in London and the other in southern Spain. Visitors are very welcome.

Members - free. Visitors: Adult - £5; Family rate - £7.50; Students - £3

Peter's talk can be attended online by obtaining tickets on our Billetto site at

["Revealing the Undiscovered Cosmos" with Peter Goodhew FRAS](#)

Members can request a promo code for free tickets by emailing [wellsmendipastro@gmail.com](mailto:wellsmendipastro@gmail.com)

### **Tuesday 18<sup>th</sup> June at 7.30pm – “West Country Myths & Legends” – a light-hearted talk by Tony Painter**

Back by popular demand, after his enjoyable talk on placenames in summer 2022, Tony returns with a new theme - Dastardly squires and nutty nobles. Did King Alfred really burn the cakes? Who arranged for hot dinners to be placed in his mausoleum after his death in case he was reincarnated? Who tried to prove the earth was flat? What was the Somerset Tsunami and what supernatural events left footprints in the snow across several counties in 1855. Tony Painter, former MoD



map research officer and local historian explores these and other curious tales of the West Country unearthed while writing local histories for Alan Godfrey maps. Tickets available on the door or in advance from [www.cpresomerset.org.uk](http://www.cpresomerset.org.uk)

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