

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

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

First Floor Exhibition Room

1 – 12 April

“Crossing Spaces” – an exhibition by iDartists



The exhibition is a celebration of the indefinable aspects of that which stimulates a diverse group of artists to produce art that can delight, mystify, interest and enthrall an audience. There are connections and contrasts in abundance.

Free entry to exhibition only

17 April – 3 May

Exhibition by Mendip Calligraphy Group

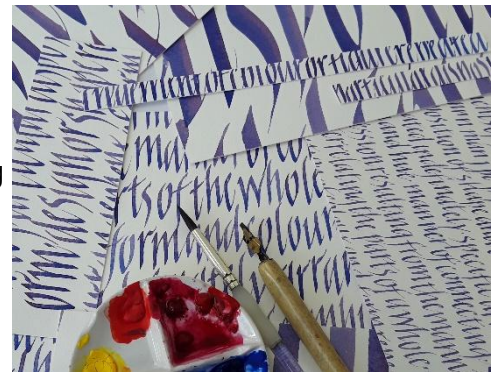
Founded in 1990, Mendip Calligraphy Group continues to welcome members of all abilities.

The aim has always been to increase the understanding and appreciation of calligraphy and lettering art.

Workshops are held monthly. This exhibition, celebrating the 35th anniversary, shows recent work by members, exploring the diversity and range of the art.

Many works will be for sale, and there will be a sales

table full of small desirable items. **Free entry to exhibition only**



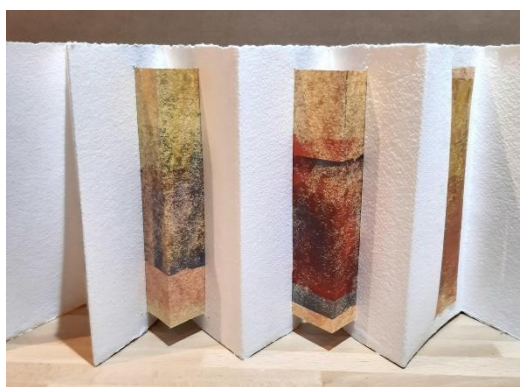
6 – 10 May

On Paper - exploring Somerset heritage paper through handmade books

A unique exhibition of artists' books by established group ABDC (Artists Book Club

Dove). You are invited to view and handle books in this fascinating show. ABCD

includes artists, printmakers, poets, textile artists, a puppeteer and a botanist, meeting monthly since 2012 at Dove Studios, Butleigh.



We shine a spotlight on the wonderfully tactile handmade papers that Somerset is famed for. A special focus is the high-quality rag paper made nearby at Wookey Hole Paper Mill until 2014. Another highlight is fine Two Rivers papers made at East Quay, Watchet. A surprisingly diverse range of materials and subject matter feature in handmade books and sculptural works on display. **Free entry to exhibition only**

13 – 24 May

Exhibition by Draycott Art Club

The artists from Draycott return for their annual affordable art exhibition.

Come and see our collection of affordable work in the beautiful Wells and Mendip Museum, by experienced and very enthusiastic beginners.

You will receive a warm welcome and our stewards are always happy to chat. **Free entry to exhibition only**



From The Curator Wolf Den



To the north-east of Crook Peak on Western Mendip is a small cave, the Wolf Den. It was excavated by boys from Sidcot School as an archaeological exercise between 1944 and 1945. The young Willie Stanton was one of the diggers. He went on to be a well-known geologist and caver. The young archaeologists were surprised to find horse and wolf bones, dating from the Late Pleistocene, perhaps between 12 and 17 thousand years old, towards the end of the Ice Age.

Wolf illustration from James Harting's 'British Animals Extinct within Historic Times' Published 1880

Wolves were hunted to extinction in England during the 16th Century to protect farm livestock. They are now widely found again in continental Europe and the age-old debate continues about controlling them. A more recent debate is about rewilding, the reintroduction of extinct fauna to increase biodiversity and address nature's imbalances. How do you feel about reintroducing wolves in remote areas of Scotland to reduce the numbers of red deer which cause so much damage to young trees?



Search & Learn Project

For the past 3½ years we have been engaged in the 'Search & Learn' project, made possible thanks to a legacy from former City Archivist and Museum Trustee Jean Imray, and a grant of £194,600 from The National Lottery Heritage Fund.

We have used the funding to transform several areas of the museum building, working with Kenn Biggs Contractors and Far Post Design to restore our founder Herbert Balch's former study, create two new social history galleries on the first floor and enhance the Lecture Hall Foyer with new exhibits and an interactive digital map of the City.

Alongside this work we have partnered with Somerset Film to develop four short films with input from the community, one exploring the life and work of Herbert Balch, the other three focusing on different aspects of the social history of the City.

1,245 glass negatives from the Phillips Collection have been digitised, catalogued and repackaged with support from Matt Williams (Curator at the Bath Royal Literary and Scientific Institution) who joined the museum team for a period of 10 months. The Phillips Collection has a dedicated display in one of the new galleries and images from this incredible local history resource have featured in several of the 'Search & Learn' exhibitions we have put on, including 'The Changing Shops of Wells in Photographs', 'The Wells Pageant of 2023' and 'The Band Plays On'.



A new ceramic mural was created by a team of c.30 volunteers drawn from the community, with additional input from children at Stoberry Park School. The process was overseen by Museum Trustee Philippa Threlfall and documented by photographer Ann Cook, who exhibited a number of her photographs in an exhibition to celebrate 'The Making of the Mural'. The mural now enhances the Museum Garden and Ann Cook's photographs featured again in an exhibition held to mark the development of the garden 'Within These Walls', curated by the garden volunteer team.

We partnered with Somerset Art Works to deliver a range of creative activities inspired by the collections, including family days, the 'Time and Place' art courses and our mentoring programme 'Get to Know Your Museum'. Three further courses were held in partnership with Heads Up Somerset, working with their regular Learning Disability, Mental Health and Dementia groups. Their collaborative artwork 'Welcome to the Brown Moth Café' was shared at Wells Art Contemporary in 2023 as part of Somerset Art Weeks, reaching an audience of c.20,000 people.

Our partnership with Somerset Art Works enabled us to work with some brilliant artists, including Fiona Campbell, Sally Dempsey, Sara Dudman, Sean Harris, Jade Ogden, Jacky Oliver, Jan Ollis and Richard Tomlinson. Our final exhibition, 'Out of Time: Underground Mendip' was guest curated by Josephine Lanyon and featured the work of two contemporary artists, Ben Rivers and Emma Stibbon. We enjoyed working with Emma on two new commissions created especially for the exhibition: a large-scale drawing inspired by a visit to Wookey Hole and a series of ambrotypes responding to geology samples collected by Herbert Balch.



Curator Vicky Dawson successfully applied for funding from Arts Council England to continue the 'China Comes to Wells' project, and this additional funding enabled us to explore the history of 8 Cathedral Green through the lens of the significant collection of domestic pottery found in the museum garden in the 1990s when the project to build the new Lecture Hall and store was underway. The exhibition 'Smashed in the Cellar' featured new commissions from artist Duncan Cameron, responses to the pottery by members of the local community and the loan of an 18th century painting 'The Tea Party' from The Goldsmith's Company.

Learning in all its forms has been at the heart of the 'Search & Learn' project and we have worked with consultant Katherine Webber to create a new set of resources and workshops for schools, and with local social enterprise 'Museum to You' to take stories inspired by the Museum's collections out to local care settings. We have supported 8 volunteer placements for job seekers referred by Wells Job Centre **Plus**, and MA students from Bath Spa University, and run a range of training sessions for our own volunteer team, including object handling, tour guiding, mentoring, mental health awareness and dementia awareness.

It has been an absolute pleasure to have worked on the 'Search & Learn' project and my thanks go to the staff, trustees and volunteers of the museum – past and present – whose willingness to go the extra mile made all this possible.

Victoria Northwood Project Manager

Library News

The new opening times for the Library from April onwards -

Tuesday - 10am to 1pm. & 2pm to 4pm.

Wednesday - 10am to 1pm & 1pm to 4pm

Thursday - 10am to 1pm

Friday - 10am to 1pm & 1pm to 4pm

Borrowing of Library Volumes

Please Note: Books borrowed from the Library should be returned after ONE week.

There are two titles overdue at time of writing;

(a) The Parish of Wookey: a New History

(b) Paper Hill Book

Duplicate copies from the Attic: should be returned after FOUR weeks

Jane Mann, engaged in a book that may keep her busy for years, has asked whether anyone can give her information of public houses in Wells and surrounding area e.g. photos old and new. Please send any information addressed to Jane Mann care/of The Hon. Librarian

Stuart Andrews, Hon. Librarian

Garden News



Spring has sprung now that we are past the equinox. For the first time a "no mow" policy was adopted between May and July last year. Some of the lawn perimeters and banks were allowed to develop untouched to encourage the spread of wildflower seeds. A profusion of primroses on the east bank this year is testament to this. Other species should appear later. The bug hotel is now virtually complete and open to new residents. The area in front of it which had been a

monoculture was clear last autumn. It will be replanted. Any donations of cuttings, bulbs or divided plants will be gratefully received. The relocated conference pear tree appears to have survived well and is in full bud. The recently established Threlfall bed is adjacent to the mural and named after its creator, Philippa Threlfall. This is its first full growing season and is beginning to fill out as intended. Finally, the annual garden open day and plant sale will take place at the beginning of June – details to be announced.

Other events in the museum

Friday 4th April at 7pm – “Red Gold of Africa: Benin, Brass, Bristol and Slavery” by Tony Coverdale. Early modern West African society placed great value on brass, one manifestation being the Benin Bronzes (actually brass). Portuguese merchants exploited this love, trading brass from the Low Countries for ivory, gold, and slaves. Bristol Merchant Venturers broke into this trade in the 18th Century. In response, industrialists opened mills in the Avon Valley to smelt copper, alloy brass and manufacture products for the Guinea market, at its peak operating thirteen mills. But with the abolition of slavery the market collapsed and the industry was decimated. Tony Coverdale of the Saltford Brass Mill Project will present on this fascinating topic.

Wells Natural History & Archaeological Society

Saturday 17th May at 7.30pm – “Bad Astronomy at the Movies” by Dr. Brad Gibson. Online & in person. Retired astrophysicist, Dr. Brad Gibson is one of the UK's most prolific science communicators. We chose something a little different from Brad's extensive list of talks to provide a lighter perspective.

To attend online, tickets can be obtained through our Billetto site (link below). Members can obtain free tickets by emailing us for a discount code.

https://billetto.co.uk/e/bad-astronomy-at-the-movies-by-dr-brad-gibson-tickets-1145619?utm_medium=share&utm_campaign=copy_link&utm_content=2

Visitors are very welcome. Members – free. Visitors: Adults - £5, Family rate - £7.50, Students - £3. **Wells & Mendip Astronomers**

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