

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 “THE CHANGING SHOPS OF WELLS IN PHOTOGRAPHS” SATURDAY 16 APRIL – MONDAY 6 JUNE

“The Changing Shops of Wells in Photographs” exhibition will open on Saturday 16 April and will run until Monday 6 June.

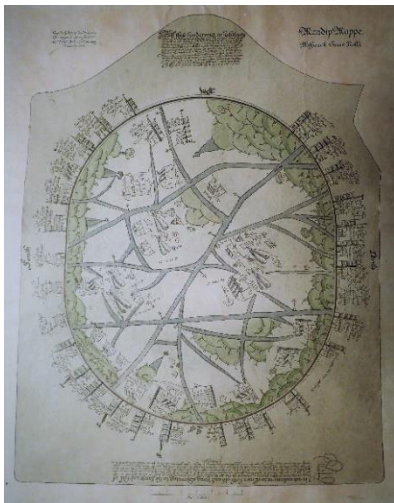
The exhibition will feature a collection of photographs of the heart of the city of Wells from the 1890s to the present day, spanning the decades and stimulating memories of shopping in Wells.

The initial response from sharing some of the photographs on our social media pages has been tremendous, and we anticipate it will be another popular event.

We would like to offer our thanks to our museum partners - Wells Civic Society, The Project Factory, Wells City Archives, Somerset Film and the Heritage Lottery Fund for enabling this exhibition to go ahead.



MENDIP MAPPE

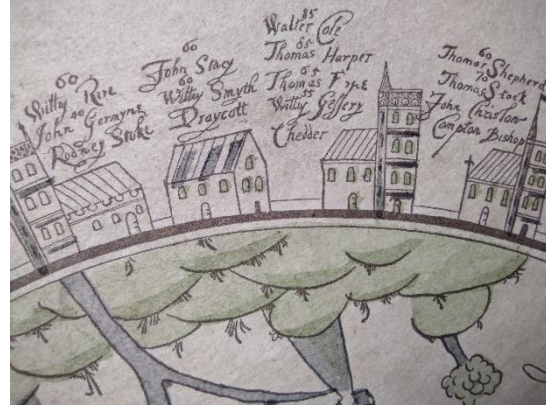
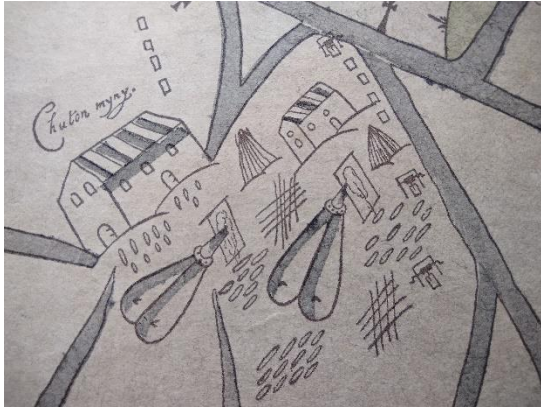


One of the treasures of the museum is this map from Ashwick Court Rolls, drawn on vellum in the late 1500s, during Queen Elizabeth I's reign. It shows the settlements on lower ground surrounding the central Mendip plateau with its ancient Royal Forest and the Mining Liberties, the medieval pattern of estates and parishes inherited from Saxon times.

The map names the 'Borderers and Inhabitants' of the Royal Forest who had rights to keep livestock on the land. It mentions the Carthusian monks at Witham who had been granted land for pasture at Charterhouse by Henry II, and it marks the locations of the 'Myneries' where Royal charters granted permission to mine for lead and process the ore.

Unlike the Ordnance Survey maps of today, it is designed to be viewed from many directions. It does show the four points of the compass, but the most recognisable features are the roads that cross the plateau that link the settlements, including those of Roman origin.

The map itself is faded and difficult to read, but in 1913 it was copied and deciphered by Harry Savory, and we use his version in the Geology gallery at the museum.



NEWS FROM WELLS CITY ARCHIVES

In March I gave a talk about the Honorary Freedom of the City of Wells to the Wells Branch of the Royal British Legion. The Freedom is the greatest tribute of respect that is in the power of Wells City Council to bestow. It is conferred as a mark of recognition and esteem upon those individuals or organisations whom the City Council considers to have made a significant contribution to Wells and its people, and to have given truly exceptional service.



Photograph © Nancy Dodd

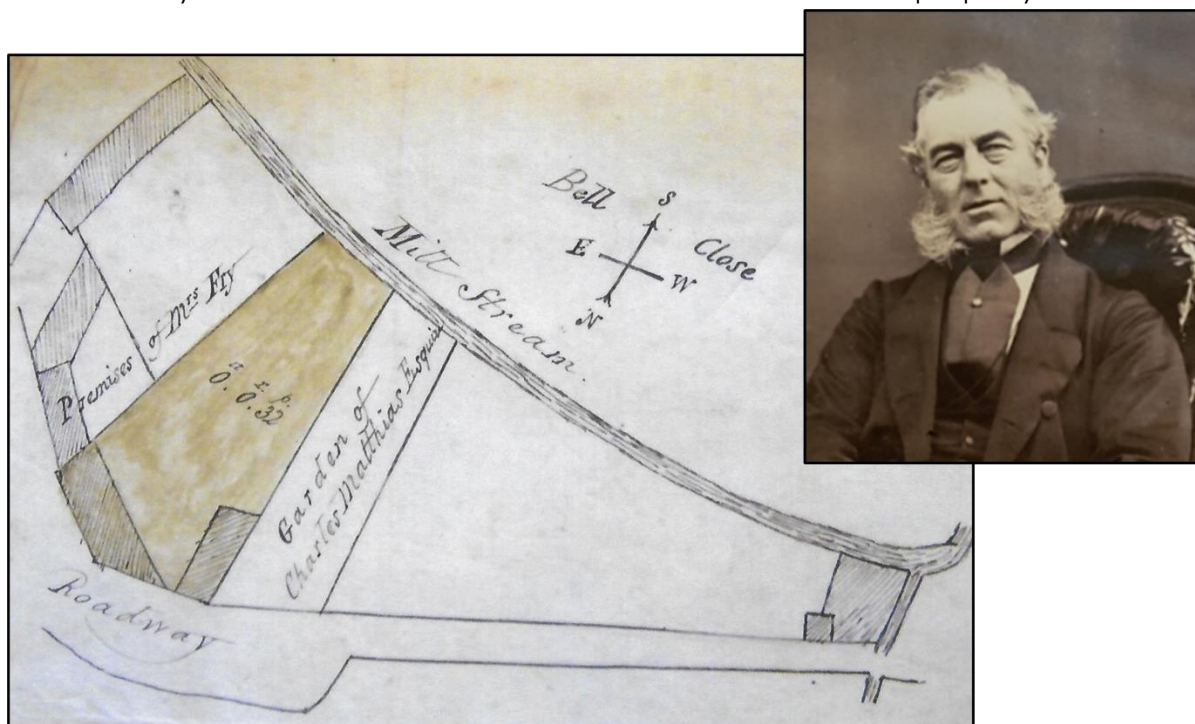
This image shows the memorable occasion when Honorable Freeman Nancy Dodd herded sheep up Wells High Street! She was exercising one of the privileges traditionally associated with freemen which are commonly believed still to exist. Another significant Honorary Freeman was Herbert Balch, founder of our Museum in 1893 and curator until 1953. Also an archaeologist, caver and geologist, and Postmaster of Wells Post Office, he was awarded the honour in 1944.

I was followed as a speaker by Peter Trueman, who talked about the fascinating history of the building on South Street which is now the Venue Club but which was for a long time the British Legion. When he was carrying out his research, he was thrilled to unearth a cache of historical documents in the City Archives. You can see images of a couple of these below. This plan of the plot dates from 1825, and he also found this photo of one of the men to whom the plot was leased, the abundantly whiskered William Chester Berryman.

Should you be passing Wells Town Hall, you could drop in to see the latest "Archivist's Choice", on display in its vestibule. Three photos of ARP volunteers are on display and many of their names were identified by Jack Paul, from whose collection they come. We'd be very grateful if you can supply any of the missing names!

As ever, Archives volunteers have been continuing with invaluable and much appreciated work. David Mather has carried out research for the Wells and Transatlantic Slavery Project Working Group, in which the City Archives continues to participate. Austin Little has almost completed his superhuman contribution to the ScraseBase database and is continuing work on the Victorian Petty Sessions database.

I'm delighted to announce that the first two of the free searchable Archives databases will be available imminently from the Museum's website. These are a database of Sacrament Certificates dating from 1689 to 1765 and a Property Index dating from 1860 (which accompanied the City of Wells Sewerage Plan). Using the map images which will also be available to download, you can work out exactly who lived in every house in Wells at that date and who owned each property!



Plan showing plot of 42 South Street in 1825 and photo of one of the men who leased it, William Chester Berryman. Later the building which became the British Legion and (later still) the Venue Club was built on this site.

Photographs © Wells City Council Archives

The City Archives is delighted to be a partner in the exhibition "The Changing Shops of Wells in Photographs", which will be opening at the Museum on 16th April. And on 21st April I shall be hosting a meeting here of the Mid Somerset Archivists and Curators

Group. I have invited Victoria Northwood, the Museum's Project Officer for "Search and Learn", to talk about this exciting project and spread the word about it. Also Reverend Dr Rob James, the Chancellor of Wells Cathedral, will talk about the Cathedral's Vicars Close project, and Museum Trustee Clare Blackmore will talk about the "Changing Shops" photographic exhibition.

I shall be retiring at the end of April. I am extremely proud to have been Wells City Archivist for the last eleven years. I have hugely enjoyed it. May I thank the many lovely people who, over the years, have acted as Archives volunteers and so generously given of their time and expertise. And the staff and volunteers of the Museum, who welcomed me so warmly when the Museum became the new home of Wells City Archives in 2011, and have continued to do so. My particular thanks go to Barry Lane and David Walker, former and present Honorary Curators, and to the incomparable Jonathan Chivers, who has been my Archives Assistant for over seven years and has been unfailingly helpful, conscientious and reliable.

Julia Wood, Wells City Archivist

LIBRARY NEWS

Some months ago the Library's collection of historic newspapers received a considerable boost. Our Mayor Philip Welch and his wife kindly gave the Library back-numbers of *The Wells Journal* covering the years 1998 to 2009. Our already existing copies of the *Journal* go back a century before that – to the 1880s and the early 1900s -bound and held by the Archivist in a controlled environment.

A small number of historic newspapers is held in the Museum Library itself, but the main collection resides in the Attic Reserve Stack under FOUR headings: **Local and Provincial, Royalty, General Events and the Second World War**. Our latest additions are confined to Royalty – no fewer than 50 newspaper titles. At the time of writing I have succeeded in interleaving the 50 new titles into their chronological position in the existing run.

As a matter of interest, I can report that only the other day a former pupil from my Norwich School days of nearly 50 years ago - and a keen collector of historic newspapers – was led to our website and recorded there our collection of historic newspapers. When he saw the name of the Hon. Librarian he wondered whether it was his old head master!

Not only was it a pleasant reunion after 48 years, but his newspaper research of the 1790's revealed for me a surprising fact. When Coleridge, (as a Cambridge undergraduate in 1792), won the Browne Gold Medal for composing a Greek Ode on the Slave Trade, his success was reported in no fewer than three provincial newspapers: Bath Chronicle, Ipswich Journal and the Leeds Intelligencer! That's a surprising fact worth adding to our Coleridge Archive.

Since I last reported, six more books on Coleridge have been added to the Archive, bringing the total to 39. **Stuart Andrews, Honorary Librarian**

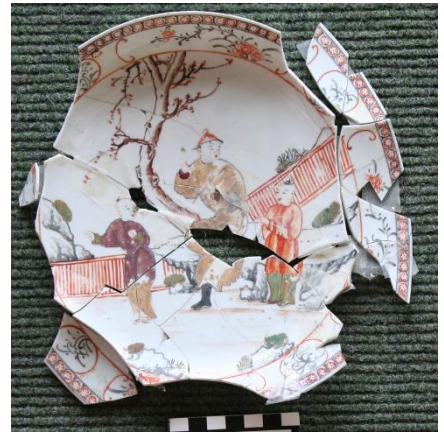
“CHINA COMES TO WELLS”

Our new Crowdfunder campaign is underway.

Will you help us conserve and put on public display a rare and amazingly complete Chinese porcelain tea set that was used in Wells in the 1770s, and recovered in pieces from Wells & Mendip Museum's garden 200 years later?

What we need to raise?

The conservation project will cost £10,900 overall. £3,000 has already been secured, and we are looking to raise the additional £7,900 needed for restoration and public display to go ahead.



To donate or to find out more about our plans for the extraordinary examples of Chinese Export Porcelain which were recovered from the museum garden 30 years ago, please go to: www.crowdfunder.co.uk/p/china-comes-to-wells

FAMILY WORKSHOPS – WEDNESDAY 1 JUNE

As part of the “China comes to Wells” project, the Museum will be running two workshops for primary aged children and their carers on Wednesday 1 June (10.00-12.30 and 14.00-16.30). The scene will be set and imaginations fired by a storyteller and by an exhibition of the fabulous pottery itself. There are then activities to enjoy, including plate painting, making a ‘porcelain’ pot, a mock archaeological dig and pottery repair and identification. Archaeologists and pottery experts will be there to answer questions and lend a hand. We’re hoping to devise a board game full of pirates, lost cargoes, landslides and invitations to take tea. Will we succeed?

Thanks to funding from Arts Council England the workshop is included within the cost of a standard family ticket to the museum (£8 per family, up to 2 adults and 3 children), which can be purchased on the door. However, places are limited and booking is recommended:

www.eventbrite.co.uk/e/china-comes-to-wells-family-workshops-tickets-308720279667



MUSEUM GARDEN OPEN DAY ON SATURDAY 7 MAY 10am – 3pm



The Museum will be holding an open garden event between 10am and 3pm on Saturday 7th May and will include a small plant sale and refreshments. The historic walled garden is a well-kept secret largely unknown, even to residents of Wells. It is hoped the event will help to unveil this recently revived medieval gem and raise funds towards its continued development and maintenance. Future planned projects include: -

- Installing steps in the raised area to an ambulant disabled standard
- Installing screens to the work and covered storage areas
- Constructing an arbour on the upper terrace to support the jasmine and roses
- Replacing two wooden benches with ones made of recycled milk container tops as installed last year

- The side entrance giving access to the lecture hall has been rather neglected over the years. Since the recent removal of conifers and a goat willow, the light conditions have been improved immeasurably. The gardening group is evaluating what planting can be done to create a more welcoming entrance for attendees of events

It will take some time to achieve these aspirations, but the garden is now an essential component of the museum's business model. It is available for celebratory events and for the use of local interest groups.

To have been able to reach this point in development of the garden, we would like to thank The Old Deanery Garden Project, John Addison, Head arborealist at Cannington College, James Cross, Head gardener at the Bishop's Palace for their funding, advice, expertise and in-kind donations and Wells Civic Society for the funding of the historic Somerset cider apple trees.

OTHER EVENTS AT THE MUSEUM

Friday 13 May at 7.30pm - Dr Emma Curtis-Lake, UK STFC Webb Fellow based at the University of Hertfordshire, will join us remotely to describe the JWST and its science goals. Dr Curtis-Lake is giving us her talk just a few weeks before the first science images are due to come down so this really is an event not to be missed. Entry to the Museum is free for WMA members with the usual £3 charge for non-members (£5 family ticket or £2 for students). If you'd prefer to join the meeting remotely then we're also planning for the first time to make this a combined in-person/online event. Details can be found on the WMA website at <http://www.wellsastronomers.org.uk/coming-up.html> .



This is a public talk given by an expert and gifted speaker about a telescope that will revolutionise (again!) our knowledge of the Universe. **Wells and Mendip Astronomers**



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