

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: Monday – Saturday 10am – 4pm. Closed Sundays.

SMALL ART EXHIBITIONS IN MEETING ROOM

The Museum's Meeting Room has been hosting a regularly changing programme of Art exhibitions since the summer of 2016, during which many individuals, and some groups, have embraced this novel opportunity to see a body of their own work displayed in a public space, overlooking the Cathedral Green.

Showing work here is an attractive proposition, there being no charge to take part. Requirements are that all work must be able to use the hanging system in situ, and available for purchase, at which time all transactions will be handled by the Museum Shop, with 30% of the selling price directed toward the running of the Museum. The Museum would like to encourage more people to take part in the programme, so if you are making something that can be displayed on a wall, why not get in touch.

“AS I SEE IT” – AN ART EXHIBITION BY BRIAN LUKER 2 MARCH – 20 APRIL

Brian learnt watercolour from the renowned ornithological painter R B Talbot-Kelly. Brian's paintings of aeroplanes, often incidents in flying careers, are distributed around the world with the fellow pilots he gave them to, so the earliest picture here is of La Alhambra in Granada.



University, career and family then produced a gap of 30 years. After a first heart attack, painting was taken up again as successful therapy to regain concentration. Brian's work has developed since with a more vivid palette and the enjoyment of the different tactility and process that oils provide in such contrast to watercolour. In both he loves texture and the understanding of shape, shadows and reflection. His subjects vary widely from still life, figure,

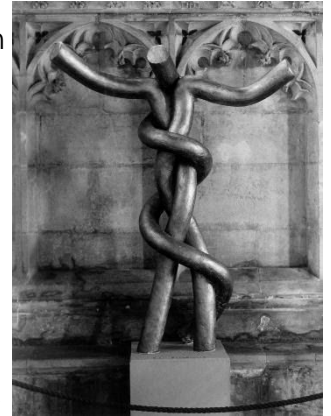
landscape (*en plein air*, when possible) to portrait works.

David Cuthbert and Robert Maxwell-Wood have been very influential in these developments, while his work is featured in Ros Cuthbert's book 'Introduction to Painting Portraits'. He has exhibited at RWS. Brian's work is firmly in the realist tradition and reflects a clarity of view that goes, he hopes, with his view of the world. Heroes are Hockney and Freud ("rescuers of English painting"), but his favourite painting is the 'Vista de Toledo' by El Greco, a portrait of Brian's best-loved city in Spain. **Museum entry fees apply**

EXHIBITION ROOM

“LORD OF THE DANCE” – AN EXHIBITION OF SCULPTURE BY SIMON LATHAM 11 MARCH – 17 APRIL

Lord of the Dance is the title of a sculpture Simon made in 1990 when he was resident Artist at Peterborough Cathedral. It is composed of three entwined, tubular elements, and creates a lively, cruciform figure. The title is shared with Sydney Carter's well-loved hymn and the Hindu god Shiva. The image can be seen as a reference to the crucified Christ ("He opened wide his arms for us on the cross") and draws to mind the Brazen Serpent, made by Moses and raised on a staff as a symbol of healing to the Israelites in the wilderness, which Christ understood to prefigure his own crucifixion. It also invites comparison with the snake entwined staff of Asclepius, who of all the gods of the ancient world is nearest to the ideal of Christ: his walking stick and snake is now a universal symbol of the medical profession.



Last year, Simon decided to recreate the life-sized sculpture that once stood in Peterborough Cathedral, the other pieces were made between 1989 and 1992. Simon is delighted that these exhibits can be seen again together as a group. Some are carved from wood and others are made of plaster. Variations on the theme



include a seated Christ in Majesty, often represented in cathedral carvings, and a reclining figure originally referring to St Paul at his conversion. Drawings, paintings and prints exploring the theme are exhibited with the sculptures alongside original photographs. It is imagery of hope, faith and sacrificial love, and he hopes you find it visually pleasing, still of interest and worth visiting.

The graphic work includes four charcoal drawings: one each of his first two woodcarvings, another showing three views of the small plaster torso figure, the last showing the reclining St Paul torso figure. There are three small black and white paintings exploring the confrontation of the two torso figures, and a colour poster of Sebastien Bourdon's "Brazen Serpent" (1660) Prado Museum, Madrid.

Simon Latham was born in 1964. He graduated from Oxford University as a Bachelor of Fine Art in 1987. Before coming to Peterborough Cathedral, he was Resident Artist at Plymouth College and Repton School. He became an Art Teacher in 1994 and has taught at schools in London and Dorset. In 2017, he retired from teaching and has been picking up the threads of past ideas and developing new ones.

Free entry to exhibition only

ART EXHIBITION BY THE WELLS PAINTING GROUP 21 APRIL – 2 MAY



Last year the group celebrated fifty years since its foundation, and it is as busy as ever with more than 30 members. The exhibition will show work in a range of media and a variety of subjects and styles and paintings and cards will be for sale.

Free entry to exhibition only.

CHILDREN'S TRADITIONAL CRAFTS ACTIVITY DAY THURSDAY 16 APRIL 10am – 12pm & 1.30pm – 3.30pm

Come and make things wonderful and wacky using wool paper, raffia... There will be demonstrations and workshops. Traditional crafts with a modern twist.

Suitable for children aged 6-12 yrs. Old clothes should be worn. No booking necessary. Children must be accompanied by an adult. **Children Free, Accompanying adults £3 each.**



NEWS FROM THE CITY ARCHIVES - accidentally omitted from last newsletter

The updated and extended "Mills of Wells" exhibition by the Mills Interest Group ran at Wells Museum from 24th October until 16th November. An impressive total of 1,031 people visited the Museum during this period. This gives us an indication of how popular the exhibition was (even though we're not sure that every one of these people viewed the display!). The excellent booklet produced by the Mills Interest Group to tie in with the exhibition, also entitled "The Mills of Wells", and published by the Museum, is flying off the shelves. It's very good value at only £5 a copy.

Glowing comments in the exhibition's Visitors' Book include:

- "Excellent display of so much detailed information following mills' and Wells' changing fortunes."
- "This exhibition does not fail to inform and entertain."
- "Fascinating exhibition, beautifully presented!"
- "What a magnificent and comprehensive piece of research!"

Jonathan Chivers, Archives Assistant has responded to a range of Archives enquiries, including one about Mendip Hospital and another from an Australian regarding court records for his ancestor who was sentenced as a convict in Wells 1850 and transported.

Recent visitors to the City Archives have included one from Sydney, Australia, who came along with three of her English relatives to find out about their Wells connections from Julia and Clare Blackmore. The four of them are shown with Clare in the photo. We had uncovered an astonishing story for them,



including a husband dead within a week of his marriage, a master builder who constructed many of Wells' significant Victorian buildings, and a tale of hidden treasure! The family name is 'George' and the Swan Hotel was owned by several generations of Georges. The Swan kindly provided coffee and pastries for our visitors and a tour of the hotel.

CURRENT NEWS FROM THE CITY ARCHIVES

HISTORY OF WELLS PROPERTIES

We have some excellent news. First of all, Stage 1 of creating the vast property database entitled "ScraseBase" is now complete! This is a momentous achievement and many thanks are given to volunteers Austin Little and Clare Blackmore, who have beavered away so hard on creating it and entering all the data. It contains a summary of Tony Scrase's landmark research into the history of hundreds of individual properties in Wells, which he is very generously allowing us to share through ScraseBase. Many of the sources for this database are contained in the City Archives. We are now in a position to embark on Stage 2 of the project and shall keep you posted! ScraseBase will eventually be released online.

I am also delighted to announce that the City Archives' already extensive holdings on the history of many houses in Wells have now been enhanced with the very welcome donation by Patrick Brown of his slides of Wells properties. We are extremely grateful for his generosity. The slides dates from the mid-1950s onwards and there are several hundred of them. We hope to digitise this collection.

Julia Wood, Wells City Archivist

MUSEUM LIBRARY

The most important Library news is that a transformation has occurred in the Library Attic. It is the place where duplicate stock and unbound periodicals are stored. More recently the newly acquired additions to our collection of historic newspapers is also stored there - and drawn on for the current Library exhibition (curated by Richard Lovegrove and Sarah Villiers) which continues until Easter.

Since the last newsletter, Library Assistant Andrew Haymes (who is also a member of the Building Maintenance Team) and Tom Nichol (also a maintenance team member) have been busy rearranging the Attic Stack in a more logical shelving sequence, renumbering the shelves and compiling an inventory of the complete Attic stock. The rearrangement has found room for a research desk with accompanying desk-lamp - and daylight lit by a large window overlooking the Museum garden.

Meanwhile we publish a brief personal tribute to Desmond Donovan, a good friend of the Library, who died on 23 December. Sarah White, a current Library Assistant, recalls working with him during the identifying, labelling and listing of the rock samples in the Geology Room: *"Desmond was primarily a palaeontologist. Thoroughly self-effacing, he was generous with his time and always encouraged colleagues to contribute. He would ask for opinions, really listen and help others to learn. So, when an unfamiliar rock presented itself, he would admit a lack of expertise and ask me (a former A-level pupil) if I had any ideas! On another occasion, when I returned from Iceland with some lava, Desmond disclaimed any specific knowledge of Iceland, but instead sent me a synopsis of the formation of the island with a description of the lavas."*

VISITOR INFORMATION SERVICE

With the opening of the new Tourist Information Centre in the Market Place the Wells & Mendip Museum said goodbye to the Visitor Information Service which it has hosted for the last ten years. The museum took on responsibility for providing tourist information for the City in 2010, and with dedication it grew into a professional service valued by visitors and residents alike. In 2018 the museum and VIS won the 'Believe in Somerset' award for its contribution to tourism.

The museum volunteers have enjoyed the work, which in addition to being a valuable community contribution has also had its lighter moments, together with an array of enquiries – many which could be answered from their vast collective knowledge to some that required more research, such as –

Are there any gluten-free restaurants in Wells?
What is worth visiting on the way down to Cornwall?
How can I get to Bangor by train?
How far is it to Salisbury and can I get there by bus?
Where is the nearest shop selling harps?
Where can I see suits of armour?
Is there any coarse fishing nearby?
What is the programme over Christmas (which was asked in February!)?
If I bring a group in May what will be on?
What eating places can you suggest for a group of 20 with mixed dietary needs?
Plus many enquiries from abroad asking for help in planning visits.

It has been a pleasure and a privilege to host the service at Wells & Mendip Museum and we recognize and value the contribution made by the volunteers over the years. Thank you!

OTHER EVENTS AT THE MUSEUM

Friday 6th March at 7.30pm - AGM followed by "The Mills of Wells" a talk by Sarah Villiers. **Wells Natural History & Archaeological Society**

Wednesday 11th March at 7.30pm – a talk by Russell Lillford, Chair of the Somerset Buildings Preservation Trust. **Wells Civic Society**

Saturday 21st March 12.30pm – 1.15pm – “**Music @ the Museum**” – join us for a lunchtime concert, followed by tea/coffee & cakes. Entry to concert by donation.

Tuesday 31st March at 7.30pm – “**Photographic Perspectives**” - Join Joshua Harris as he talks about his experience photographing and filming wildlife.

Somerset Wildlife Trust

Friday 3rd April at 7.30pm – “**Alfred and the Great Somerset Connection**” – a talk by Chris Eldridge. **Wells Natural History & Archaeological Society**

Wednesday 8th April at 7.30pm – “**A Bishop's Wife**” – a talk by Jane Hancock
Wells Civic Society

Tuesday 28th April at 7.30pm - "Tawny Owls coming to a wood near you" - a talk by Steven Powles. In the talk Steven will describe the lives of these birds, much of it gleaned from a wild owl which he observed and photographed for over 15 years.
Somerset Wildlife Trust



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