

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 late Peter Coate, a prominent local artist, long held an ambition to find a display area in Wells where artists from across the region can showcase their work. We are pleased to be able to provide this facility, with the intention that it will be a regularly changing exhibition to allow as many artists to exhibit as possible.

If you are interested in exhibiting in this area, or for more details, please email your contact details to: Christine Quinn admin@wellsmuseum.org.uk



UNTIL 25 NOVEMBER – AN ART EXHIBITION OF MENDIP/COASTAL STUDIES AND A RACING CERTAINTY BY SARAH DE SAY

Most paintings are oil, but there are also pieces in pen and ink, water based paints, linocut, paper pictures and prints, machine stitching, glass and bas relief.

27 NOVEMBER – 29 JANUARY 2018 – ART EXHIBITION BY WENDY & BECKY LOVEGROVE

Mother and daughter Wendy & Becky Lovegrove are holding a joint exhibition in the Meeting Room of the Museum, starting on November 27th. Wendy paints mainly in oils in response to a wide variety of subject material: landscapes, cityscapes, portraits, flowers and animals; Becky enjoys creating 3D pieces made from driftwood. Both have been showing their work in the Somerset area and beyond for many years, and are looking forward to your visit to see their show.



FINDS IDENTIFICATION DAY

Thursday 16 November 11am – 3pm

Laura Burnett, the Finds Liaison Officer for Somerset County Council, will be available to identify your finds from digging your garden or while walking your dog.

No charge or booking necessary

SOMERSET WOMEN AT WAR 1914 – 1918

Until Mid-March 2018

Somerset's unsung heroines of the First World War are featured in a new exhibition in our Library. The display highlights the military support organizations in which Somerset women played so important a part – **Women's Army Auxiliary Corps (WAAC)**, **First Aid Nursing Yeomanry (FANY's)**, and the **Voluntary Auxiliary Detachment (VAD)** which was linked to the Red Cross.



Nurses from those units found themselves at one of over 150 base hospitals in France, close enough to the front line to hear the noise of the guns, while hospitals themselves were sometimes bombed by the primitive aircraft of the day.

Huge numbers of nurses were also needed in Somerset to care for casualties invalided home from the front. Many emergency hospitals were created, often by converting large private houses.

In Wells, "The Cedars" former home of the Tudor Quilter family, was refitted as a hospital – as recorded in photos and press reports in the Museum display.

It was not only nurses who played a vital role on the Home Front. The newly formed Women's Institutes achieved monumental amounts of knitted wear for soldiers and war-workers, while supposedly male jobs were taken over by women: railway station-masters and ticket collectors, postal deliveries, munitions workers, policemen, managers of shops and other businesses, and, (perhaps above all) the life-saving efforts of the Land Girls who ensured the nation did not starve.

It is only through press reports or even obituaries that the war-time contribution of Somerset women can be traced and belatedly recognized. That is what the Museum Library exhibition sets out to do.

NEWS FROM WELLS CITY ARCHIVES

The "Snapshots in Time: Mapping Wells" joint exhibition, which ran at the Bishop's Palace from 6th May to 30th September, had an incredible 45,930 visitors! There were also fantastic comments in the Visitors' Book, such as these: "A wonderful and informative exhibition, well laid out and easy to follow. Obviously well researched. The charters are a big bonus."

"Super exhibition – enough information (but not too much) + beautifully displayed! What an absolute treat to see the old documents especially. Fascinating exhibition."

It was a wonderful response to a highly successful and enjoyable collaboration between Wells City Archives, Wells & Mendip Museum, and the Bishop's Palace. As far as the Archivist knows, this is the first time the King John, Bekynton and Queen Elizabeth I charters have ever been on public display, so it was a great opportunity for people to see them.

On 28th September, the Archivist hosted a meeting of the Mid Somerset Archivists and Curators Group at the Museum. Seventeen attendees were given a tour of the City Archives and a visit to the "Snapshots in Time" exhibition. Then on 31st October, the volunteer Learning Officer, Donnie Hauser, and the Archivist hosted a GEM training session on "Effective Engagement" here.



Finds unearthed during an Archives Box Listing session gave rise to the idea of a charity Victorian dinner. This will be held at the Swan Hotel, and will recreate some of the dishes from the banquets at Victorian Mayormakings - which also took place at the Swan. Reproductions of the beautiful Victorian menus of lavish banquets held there will be on display at the event. This fundraising dinner will take place on 4th February, and is in aid of Wells & Mendip Museum and Macmillan Cancer Support. Tickets cost £30.00 per person, which includes entrance to the exhibition, gala dinner and entertainment. The tickets are available from zoe@swanhotelwells.co.uk or by calling 01749 83630. You may wear Victorian dress if you wish!

FROM OUR CURATOR

Whenever I've been at the museum over the last few months I've been struck by just how much is going on! Exhibitions have come and gone, lovingly assembled, stewarded and dismantled, maintenance works are planned and carried out, and it is sometimes a struggle to find a room for a meeting as other groups are meeting as well. Throughout the garden has looked magnificent.

I found 'Playing with Time', Sean Harris's installation in the Balch Room, most rewarding. Through his 'Flip Book Boxes' Sean has found a novel way to animate static museum collections and place them with contextual information about their finder, their impact on society or scientific thought etc. The installation itself, together with the associated schools and family learning activities, the involvement with other participating museums, and participation in Somerset Art Weeks has been a pleasure.

Planning for the new 'Story of Wells' gallery spaces and for refurbishing 'Balch's Study' has continued apace, with fresh ideas and practical solutions coming from the museum interpretation and design specialists Far Post Design. Mike and Sarah Cashman from FPD have helped us to focus exactly what we expect from each space for our visitors. What is coming through is the importance of 'people's stories', how particular themes or historical events can be seen through the testimony, belongings, photographs and records of individuals who have lived in the City.

One of the things that the Collections Working Group have been doing on Mondays is 'retrospective documentation', updating records so that we know the current locations of items. Some have not been looked at since the collections were moved into the newly built strongroom some fifteen years ago. This time-consuming activity is now really showing dividends as we have a much clearer picture of the collections, making it easier to answer enquiries accurately and efficiently. It is also becoming apparent just how significant the collections are.

Several interesting items have come into the collections recently. The first is an early cave diving suit, a submarine escape 'goon suit' that was used in Mendip caves in the 1960s by the veteran cave divers Angus Innes and Dan Hasell. It is in excellent condition, complete with its original carrying case. The second is a National Union of Railwaymen certificate, presented to Charles John Greenwood who was Chairman

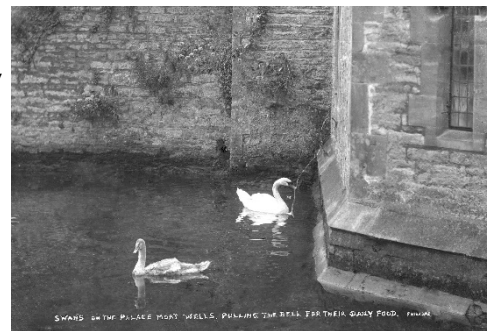
of the Wells Branch of the NUR for fourteen years. The artwork on the certificate is superb.

As you know our website and social media is most important for letting the wider world know what the museum is doing, and I'm grateful to our Museum Manager, Christine, and our volunteers Doug Robinson and Gill Pettit for running these so well. However, the museum finds itself in need of extra support in this area, so if you have digital media skills and would like to work on the museum's website do please get in touch. David Walker, Curator.

SAVE OUR SWAN

The Museum has launched a unique **SOS** appeal to Save Our Swan. The majestic swans on the Palace Moat are a source of pride and identity to Wells and are known all over the world for their unique ability to ring the bell at the gatehouse to be fed.

The first swan to learn this skill was taught by Miss Emily Eden in the late 1850s the daughter of the Bishop of Bath and Wells, The Right Reverend Lord Auckland. The original swan is preserved and on display in the Museum but having been in its present case for over 150 years it is in much need of conservation. However, the skill to preserve this unique exhibit is expensive and is going to cost £2,000 and the museum is hoping that the citizens and visitors to Wells will help to raise the money.



The Swan Hotel, Wells Chamber of Commerce and Wells Civic Society have all been approached for donations and were only too happy to support the campaign and Rosie Martin Chief Executive of the Bishop's Place Trust said; "We are delighted that the museum is taking steps to conserve this unusual piece of history. The Palace Swans hold a special place in the hearts of the people of Wells and our visitors." Our swan is part of an entirely unique piece of English history and desperately needs conservation so that it can take centre stage in a new exhibition that the museum is planning about the secular history of Wells. The swan is the symbol of Wells and many thousands of people each year come to watch the swans ring the bell for food and the museum wants to feature the original swan that Miss Eden taught over 150 years ago."

As a matter of courtesy the trustees have written to Her Majesty the Queen as keeper of the country's swans to inform her of the SOS campaign and ask for her support.

If you would like to contribute to the conservation of the swan, Wells and Mendip Museum would be delighted to receive donations.

E mail admin@wellsmuseum.org.uk – Tel:01749 673477

MUSEUM GARDEN

Our lovely Museum garden has recently won 2 awards for its wildlife and conservation projects. The Somerset Wildlife Trust have presented us with a plaque which we have proudly displayed in our entrance hall, and we have received a £100 Wessex Watermark award for water conservation to go towards the purchase of some water butts. A huge thank you goes out to our garden volunteer, Susan Bates for all her hard work.

MUSEUM SHOP

The Museum shop is now stocking a range of lovely stocking fillers such as traditional toys and games, "gifts in tins" and fossils and gemstones, as well as books, cards, etc.

2018 CALENDAR "Memories of Somerset Fire Brigade" £6.50 each

Memories of Somerset Fire Brigade



OTHER MUSEUM EVENTS

Tuesday 28th Nov at 7.30pm – "Mendip Ponds Project" – A talk by John Dickson regarding the Reptile and Amphibian group project to restore 14 great crested newt ponds on the Mendip Hills. The project commenced in the Autumn of 2016 and extends to the end of 2017. **Somerset Wildlife Trust**

Friday 1st Dec at 7.30pm – "The History of the Wassail" – Alan Stone has made a study of the local cider industry and all of its traditions. He might even bring some of his homemade cider to accompany his talk. His talk will be followed by the Christmas party for which donations of food will be very welcome. **Wells Natural History & Archaeological Society**

Wednesday 13th Dec at 7.30pm – "Seasonal Celebration – Victorian Christmas in Wells" – an evening to enjoy good company, refreshments and some light entertainment. **Wells Civic Society**



The Museum would like to thank all our volunteers and Museum Friends for their continued support and to wish everyone a Very happy Christmas and a Peaceful & Prosperous New year.



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