



MUSEUM NEWS

Steyning Museum Newsletter

April 2010

Museum Diary

- 17.04.10 Spring Coffee Morning
Penfold Hall
10.30 - 12.00
- 30.07.10 Garden Coffee Morning
Rosebank, Jarvis Lane
10.30 - 12.00
- 30.10.10 Autumn Coffee Morning
Penfold Hall
10.30 - 12.00

200 Club

February Draw:

- 1st prize = Ronald Finch (£35)
2nd prize = James Parsons (£25)
3rd prize = Mavis Macdougall (£15)

March Draw:

- 1st prize = Peter Burton (£35)
2nd prize = Betty Calloway (£25)
3rd prize = Gwen Lowe (£15)

Steyning Showcase

If any of you didn't get along to the Steyning Showcase on 27th February, I thought you might like to know that the Museum stall attracted a steady flow of interest. The Parish Council provided the occasion for the clubs and organisations of the town to mount a display of what they offer to the public. We had a small, hard-working band of Museum volunteers who built and staffed our stall. Being sited just inside the door, we were able to catch people as they arrived. We judged it a good day, with half a dozen new Museum Friends signed up.

The AGM

We were back to our old venue of the Penfold Hall for our AGM on 20th March this year. The annual reports were presented and approved, followed by the election of committee members. Peter Hoare, after many years on the committee, stepped down this year, and it was unanimously agreed that he should be granted the honour of becoming President in appreciation of his many years of loyal service to the Museum since its inception. He has undertaken many roles on the management committee over the years and we are very pleased that as president he will keep in touch with Museum affairs.

The Management Committee for 2010/2011 will be:

Chairman	Jacquie Buttriss
Vice Chairman	Jackie Campbell
Minutes Secretary	Helen Coutrouzas
Treasurer	Paul Norris
Curator	Chris Tod
Communications/Friends	Tony Ketteyman
Stewards	Sarah Leigh
Social Events	Gillian Kille
Shop Sales	Liane Watt
Education	Joan Denwood
Publicity	David Haseldine

Members of the Social Events Sub-Committee:

Pam Perry, Diana Smyth, Iris Taylor.

Chaired by Gillian Kille

After a break for tea, Ian Gledhill gave us a fascinating and humourous talk on seaside entertainment, including a reference to our local celebrities, Gert and Daisy (Elsie and Doris

Waters).

Spring Coffee Morning

Our Spring coffee morning is to be held in the Penfold Hall on 17th April, starting at 10.30 am. There will be the usual raffle and bric-a-brac, as well as a cake stall, so contributions for these will be most welcome. As it is Spring, there will also be a plant stall. This has been very popular in the past, so please hunt out the plants you feel you can spare and bring them along on the day.

Boarding House Archaeology

The construction of the new boarding house at Steyning Grammar School provided an opportunity for archaeologists to investigate the site before the big machines moved in to start work.

We are learning to live with the building work on our doorstep, though we will be very happy when it is finished at the end of the year. Once the demolition work was complete and before they started ground clearance and construction on the new boarding house and refectory, the archaeologists were given their chance.

Their efforts were a little handicapped by previously installed services and by the site of the old swimming pool. It also cannot have been easy in thick mud and freezing conditions.

What the archaeologists found will not be fully reported for some while, but there are some pointers. First of all, they found some features which seemed to be continuations of others reported back in 1967 when Fletcher's Croft car park was being excavated. Secondly, there were some signs of burgage plots having been aligned along School Lane. Apart from that, the main findings were of a number of boundary ditches, rubbish pits, and a small scatter of post holes dated, with the help of diagnostic pottery sherds, to the 11th to 13th centuries. This is consistent with the pattern of settlement spreading out from the Church at that stage in Steyning's history. The High Street alignment of the town probably only became established from the 12th century onwards following the building of the causeway and bridge at Bramber. When and how settlement spread down Church Street from the Church, however, cannot be easily established. Just possibly the full report on the School dig will help our further understanding.

Sadly, what we know for certain is that, on our School site, we have nothing like as exciting as the Bronze Age settlement being excavated on the playing fields of Boundstone Community College (now the Sir Robert Woodard Academy) on the coastal plain at Lancing.

Mini Exhibitions

We are planning a series of monthly mini displays starting in May. We will be calling them "Treasures of the Month". Each month will focus on one particular "Treasure" – one picture, one photograph, one document or one object with a story explaining its choice. The special attraction of these exhibitions is that it won't be Chris, but one of the other people involved with the Museum who will be taking it in turns to make the choice of a "Treasure" and chip in with ideas for the display – though Chris will be around to help if needed. The first of these exhibitions has been chosen by Lynda Denyer so that "Treasure of the Month" will be called "Lynda's Choice". The June exhibition will be someone else's choice and so on.

The aim is threefold – to give an airing to items in the collection which don't often get put on show, to create a flow of new things for our visitors to see and enjoy and, hopefully, to give those who haven't previously tried their hand at creating displays a taste for the experience.

So far, eight people have come up with suitable "Treasure" ideas and there are others who are promising to make their choice soon. We need more, however, and it would be nice to have two years worth of ideas in the pipeline. We very much hope that some of you, reading this, will be encouraged to scour our collection for inspiration or come up with your own ideas. If you would like to take part do please talk to Chris.

There will, incidentally, continue to be the usual bigger, and less frequent, temporary exhibitions.

End Piece

Our end piece this month has been provided by Lynda Denyer. She and Doug Thompson have been researching the origins of the altar screen in St Andrews Church, and the article sets out their findings.

Tony Ketteman (Editor)

The Steyning Screen: part one

One of the wonders of Steyning stands with pride of place in St Andrew's church, behind the altar, yet nobody knows where it came from or how it got here. This new look at the question describes first what the screen itself can tell us, before making some interesting connections next time, in part two.

The Steyning screen is in fact a set of lavishly carved oak panels, helpfully inscribed with the date 1522. Until 1961 the screen was in the old vicarage or priory, when it was moved to the newly built vicarage nearby. It remained there until 1983, looking gloomy and out of place in its modern setting. Hopefully it has now found an appropriate home where it can be appreciated for many generations to come.

The earliest hint of the presence of the screen in Steyning is in 1781. The famous antiquarian, William Burrell of Knepp Castle commissioned the artist S. H. Grimm to visit Steyning. Grimm produced detailed ink and watercolour records of Steyning church and - a ceiling at the vicarage. Strange to say, the ceiling showed the same Tudor features as the screen, but the ceiling was lost some time later and Grimm did not record the old oak panelling. A picture in the *Sussex County Magazine* of October 1950 shows how the panels looked in the old vicarage parlour.

It might be logical to expect that the panels were designed and carved for the old vicarage in 1522, but they certainly were not. The picture shows how awkwardly they were cut and fitted. The damage is evident today. Some pieces were possibly discarded, used elsewhere or even left in an earlier setting. The quality and the subject matter hint that the panels came from a magnificent setting, vastly more affluent than Steyning in 1522. In fact the 16th Century was one of the low points of the town's prosperity. The *Victoria County History* describes it as 'largely populated by labourers' and 'much declined'. It was a century in which the church began to fall down, after which both church and vicarage needed extensive repair.

So what does the screen itself tell us about its origins? The answer is a great deal, except that reading the clues has been fraught with difficulty for many years, even centuries. Chris Tod, David Thompson, Doug Thompson and Lynda Denyer recently decided to play history detectives with the help of a new research tool - the internet.

The screen as it now appears measures about 8ft high by 14ft long. The outer frame to the left and right appears to match the main beam of the ceiling depicted by Grimm. It may even be the same piece of wood. The 47 panels show the royal arms, the lion rampant, angels, dragons, greyhounds, fleurs-de-lis, Tudor roses, thistles, the portcullis, acorns and oak leaves, and Catherine of Aragon's pomegranates and grape vines. All this and more is sufficient to justify the date which appears in abbreviated Latin lettering on one of eight carved scrolls at the top. The screen could only have come from the time of King Henry VIII and his first wife Catherine.

Another scroll shows a tiny mitre and a dolphin with the words, "The arms of Richard fitzJames late Bishop of London" in abbreviated Latin. This explains many more symbols. One panel shows Richard fitzJames' arms, which had two crosses with dolphins, and an eagle. His personal arms were impaled with those of his diocese as he progressed from Bishop of Rochester (1497) to Chichester (1504), then to London

(1506). On the screen his arms have the crossed swords of London with a bishop's mitre above, supported by figures, possibly angels. St Paul appears twice, with gospel scrolls and with a sword. Dolphins and eagles decorate several other panels.

Bishop fitzJames demolished the old bishop's palace at Fulham and rebuilt it in Tudor style, proudly displaying his arms. Had the old cathedral of St. Paul's survived, including the fitzJames tomb, it might have revealed more. FitzJames was a prolific builder. His armorial dolphins are also on display at Merton College, Oxford where he was Warden from 1482 to 1507. FitzJames escorted Catherine of Aragon in 1501 when she came to England to meet her first husband, Prince Arthur. The bishop housed her at Fulham Palace in 1506, during the miserable years after Arthur's death. Catherine's eventual marriage to King Henry in 1509 was a triumph for Bishop fitzJames. He was a formidable force, particularly in his persecution of Lollards and devotees of the Wycliffe Bible. At his death in 1522, Richard fitzJames was the last Roman Catholic bishop of London. His successor soon became embroiled in King Henry's divorce, his marriage to Anne Boleyn and the Reformation.

There are two further images which have been the main causes of confusion about the panels. The first occurs eleven times. It has been interpreted as an elaborate W (or a W with two inter-laced Ls, one as a mirror image) plus two Es (one as a mirror image), one on each side. It has long been observed that a similar image appears above a gateway at Chichester Cathedral, in Canon Lane. Doug Thompson believes he has interpreted both. The symmetric monogram on the screen consists of the letters VLE (Vero Londiniensis Episcopus or In Truth Bishop of London) interlaced with their mirror images. At Chichester the letters VCE represent Vero Cicestrensis Episcopus (In Truth Bishop of Chichester) interlaced in the same way. Heretics had long denied the authority of the bishops who persecuted them. Bishop FitzJames, like many others, emphasised his appointment by the Pope and his 'true' consecration.

The second puzzling image may also be more straightforward than it seems. It has been interpreted, unconvincingly, as an S, I and O, leading to the conclusion that the screen came from Sion Abbey. Sion or Syon certainly had charge of Steyning in 1522, but this is a false trail. The image surely displays some of the symbols of the bishop's authority. There are the vestments with the crosier and a bishop's seal in the typical almond shape, or vesica.

There are two scrolls which state in Latin, "Give glory to God who made all these things" and "The arms of St Richard one time Bishop of Chichester". This saint was possibly personal to fitzJames, his namesake. Both had been bishops of Chichester. But there are no arms of St Richard to be seen - only a tiny carved fret on his scroll. If the St Richard panel ever reached Steyning, it is now lost. Could it be that the scrolls were actually carved for Steyning, and the VLE monogram was mistaken for the arms of St Richard? If so, the monogram in Canon Lane, Chichester, may have caused the error. In *Sussex Archaeological Collections*, vol. 16, p. 237, Matthew Bloxham gave an account of the Steyning panels in 1863. He did not describe a St Richard panel and so by 1863 it probably wasn't there - and neither, it seems, was the Tudor ceiling.

At Steyning Museum, David Thompson has maintained a file of information and research on the subject. An illustrated booklet of research during 1990 is available for only £1.

Lynda Denyer