



MUSEUM NEWS

Steyning Museum Newsletter

December 2009

Museum Diary

- 16.01.10 Stewards and helpers Social
Penfold Hall
11.30am
- 20.03.10 AGM
Penfold Hall
2.30pm
- 17.04.10 Spring Coffee Morning
Penfold Hall
10.30 - 12.00

200 Club

October Draw:

- 1st prize = Gill Kemp (£35)
2nd prize = Mr C Westoby (£25)
3rd prize = David Humphreys (£15)

November Draw:

- 1st prize = Joy Davey (£35)
2nd prize = Neil Jones (£25)
3rd prize = Mavis Macdougall (£15)

Autumn Coffee Morning

From Sally Lefroy:

Our coffee morning on Saturday 24th October was wet and grey this year. However, in direct contrast, the atmosphere inside the Penfold Hall was fun and full of laughter as everyone enjoyed meeting friends and relaxing over their refreshments. This time we also provided delicious fruit cake as well as biscuits made by one of our helpers which was much appreciated. We had 61 people and made a net profit after expenses of £222.98. Many thanks to you all for coming and supporting us. I would also like to say a very big thank you to all the helpers and those who provided items for sale. Our next coffee morning will be in the spring on Saturday

17th April 2010 and we look forward to seeing you then. In the meantime on behalf of the social events sub-committee may I wish you all a very Happy Christmas and New Year.

Museum Social Events Sub-Committee

We wouldn't be able to hold our very successful coffee mornings if it wasn't for the members of the Social Events Sub-Committee who tirelessly work to make them, and all our social events, so enjoyable.

Numbers on the committee are a bit low at present so we would welcome having some new members to provide new ideas and enthusiasm! It would not take up much time and no special skills are required.

Please consider joining the members of the group, and if you think you might be interested please contact Sally Lefroy who could explain what would be involved. You can either leave her a note with your phone number at the museum or on email at: sallylindsay@tiscali.co.uk

The Big Draw Day

From Jacquie Buttriss:

On Saturday 11th October, the sun shone on Steyning's buildings which was an enormous help as the Big Draw Art Day began. Our theme this year was indeed the buildings of Steyning and visitors came throughout the day, many of them taking Museum clip-boards out to sketch buildings or their features. Other participants sketched displays, models or photos in the Museum or came straight into the Penfold Hall, where a wide variety of media were available to help all-comers paint or make their finished artworks. Participants ranged from toddlers upwards, through all the age-ranges. Many

came in family groups and all had fun trying out new materials or different angles, producing drawings, paintings, collages, rubbings and 3D models. They have all now been mounted together to make a striking display in the foyer of the museum. Do look out for it next time you visit.

"My house, my house, my house," proclaimed 3-year old Leonard triumphantly as he held up his colourful collage, complete with the number on the front door (with a little help from his family). *"It's a good chance to be creative,"* commented an enthusiastic adult visitor from Upper Beeding. *"It's doing it with other people – More people should come. You have all the facilities. There are not many opportunities to do artwork together,"* agreed a talented mother and daughter from Steyning. *"It's a good social thing to do,"* added a couple from Suffolk, staying in Saxon Cottage.

Of course, none of this would have been possible without the enthusiasm and hard work of several people. We especially want to thank local artist Adam Judge, who was our leader for the day and gave his time, energy and expertise free of charge, assisted by Big Draw co-ordinator Jacquie Buttriss. Also many thanks to our curator, Chris Tod, together with Joan Denwood, Lianne Watt, Peter Burton, Diana Smyth and the six stewards who were on duty that day, all of whom in their different roles, helped to make the day a great success. Thanks also to David Hazeldine, Tony Kettman and Paul Norris who helped behind the scenes. Finally we want to thank the Co-operative Community Fund, who awarded us a grant to buy materials and hire the hall for the day.

Thank you one and all.

Immersion Day

From Joan Denwood:

One of our now regular yearly activities involves the whole of the first year from Steyning Grammar School Church Street. On two action packed days in October we had approximately 200 children and many members of staff visiting the museum.

They were discovering the different ways in which they could learn about the past, for example through physical, visual, written and oral evidence.

In the museum we set up tasks for them

whereby they had to study certain displays and record how they found the information. This could be through objects, maps, photographs, documents, oral and text. Finding the answers often of course involved more than one way.

Outside the museum, they were taken on a 'looking for evidence' walk along Church Street and to the Church.

All the children enjoyed themselves and hopefully are now adept at looking for historical evidence!

Many thanks must go to Chris Tod, Julian Buttery and Margaret Holloway who all helped to make these days successful.

Joan Denwood

Christmas Cards

Katy Sleight's attractive design for our Christmas card this year, has drawn many compliments so we expect sales to be brisk. They are on sale in the Museum so hurry down before they all go.

Subscriptions

It's that time again when I send reminders to those who pay the Friends subscriptions in cash. The next payment falls due on 1st January 2010, so you will find a reminder and payment slip attached to your newsletter. This only applies to cash payers, so if I haven't enclosed a reminder, then you pay by standing order and need take no action.

End Piece

In the October newsletter, we were introduced by Lynda Denyer to a mystery attached to the Steyning Poem. We learned that questions have been raised as to whether John Stanley Purvis could have been the author. Since then, the Museum has received more information which throws further light on the mystery. Lynda explores this new information in this month's end piece.

Tony Kettman
Editor

NB - please don't forget that the Social Events group need some more help.

The Steyning Poem - *Further Discoveries*

Was the Steyning poem written in the trenches on December 2nd 1915, or was the poet John Stanley Purvis still a teacher at Cranleigh School, Surrey? Did he also write the poem High Wood? Thanks to an extraordinary discovery, we now know more about the poet.

In September, the Museum asked an academic contact to visit the Borthwick Institute to seek a copy of John Stanley Purvis' handwriting from as early a date as possible. This was a simple precaution to compare it with the unsigned manuscript of the Steyning poem, which had come to the Museum as a gift. Purvis, who became Canon Purvis, was the first Director of the Borthwick Institute. From 1938 he collected, catalogued and preserved about two million documents for the Borthwick, all relating to the Diocese of York.

What emerged from the Borthwick archive was an old brown note book, a copy of which came to the Museum on a computer disk. The book contents were entitled *Verses and Fragments*. Written in pencil, there were about fifty poems composed between 1912 and July 1917. John Stanley Purvis had signed and initialled his work, and it was in the same hand as our Steyning poem original. Many dates and locations were shown. The Steyning poem and High Wood were both included. At the front Purvis had written:

G.B.P. killed. June 8.1917. News brought. June 16.

G.B.P. was George Bell Purvis, John Stanley's brother. The decline of an optimistic, idealistic young Cambridge graduate, a recently employed teacher who loved his school and new-found friends, into a man longing only for an end to his weariness in death, is simply heartbreaking to read. His last dated poem on July 18, 1917, *At Humbercamps*, is an imagined conversation with his brother, lying in a Belgian cemetery. It concludes:

And he in turn speaks whispering to me:

All day must you go restless to and fro
Busied, unsatisfied,
And feeling so much unachieved, still go
At night to rest which morning will frustrate,
Uncertain of the least of things to come
And open to the slightest blow of fate.

Contentless even that you feel the sun
And that warm human blood . . .

Less in keeping with modern taste were a few poems written for publication in The Cranleigh school magazine. These reflected what a responsible public school might want young boys to read in times of war, rather than a man wrestling with his personal nightmares. Even where no reference to The Cranleigh was given, these compositions are quite easy to detect. One poem which stands out, however, is entitled *To a Cranleighan*:

Be sure that if my soul when flesh-released
Shall find its dearest liberties increased,
More free to wander and more strong to love,
Here shall I wander, and not here the least.

If in some moment of a day to be
You feel a presence which you cannot see,
Familiar though and friendly, then believe
That near you, though unseen, you still have me.

Then if my love has helped you in your need,
Or ever prompted to a nobler deed,
Or from my being any profit came,
Love, understanding, joy, in fuller meed:

Be sure then that my shade has found a way
To come back to your side, and thus repay
Old happinesses and the love you gave
And hours that raised me higher in my day.

Dated the day before the Steyning poem was written, this appears, entitled *A Thought*:

That budded chestnut branch – I may be dead,
Ere in the Spring its leaves are fully spread.

A Thought was written at Cranleigh. Purvis was preparing to leave for war and almost certain death. This is the context for the Steyning poem – a stark realisation of what was to come, an acute sense of loss and yet almost complete resignation to the inevitable. Only two months into his service at the Western Front as a 2nd Lieutenant, on 28 May, 1916, even the declaration of peace was a dreadful prospect:

What will you feel? A joy which leaps beyond
All reason, every bond
Of your restraint, hot, clamorous and wild?
Or feel life empty, for the loss of some
Who now can never come
Back to their places in the pleasant sun?
Or shunning others' joy shall bear apart
A sorrow in your heart
To throb and ache through time without relief:
All that was lovely dead, you living yet
Not hoping to forget
And weary, weary, weary to the end?

Those of us who knew survivors of the Great War, even as close relatives, might not have guessed that they suffered similar lifelong sorrows. Typically, they would never have discussed it. *Veterans*, dated July 1917, is another expression of inconsolable loss:

Oh we have lived into another age
And seen the comrades of our century die,
Suffered too much to suffer any more,
Dulled with deep horrors, and familiar so
With hopeless disappointment that today
No disappointed hope can make us sore.
Though we fend off our sadness in the day,
At evening in the stillness it gets home.
Oh oh! For longing that can never be!
Oh for the men our friends who died last year,
Who walked with us in England but of late
And now are with the sleepers of the Somme.

Overall, this collection is not an account of life and death in the trenches, but rather a glimpse of how one man suffered emotionally and spiritually. The poet may never have intended his work to see the light of day, beyond those verses which he had already submitted for publication. On the other hand, he collected his poems together, copied them into a note book, kept them throughout his life and deposited them in the archive which he famously created. As an historian and archivist, he probably knew how valuable they might one day become.

Lynda Denyer