



MUSEUM NEWS

Steyning Museum Newsletter

February 2010

Museum Diary

- 20.03.10 AGM
 Penfold Hall
 2.30pm
- 17.04.10 Spring Coffee Morning
 Penfold Hall
 10.30 - 12.00

200 Club

December Draw:

- 1st prize = Mavis Macdougall (£35)
2nd prize = Jill Kemp (£25)
3rd prize = Diana Blacklock (£15)

January Grand Draw:

- 1st prize = Janet Pennington (£100)
2nd prize = Mrs C Holmes (£50)
3rd prize = David Thompson (£25)

Stewards' and Helpers' Social

We are sorry that we had to deprive you of your mulled wine this year, but the weather got the better of us. The pavements were in such a dangerous condition that we felt that very few people would venture out, leaving us with gallons of mulled wine, but not enough people to drink it.

Chris Tod Reports

On the 20th August, I came into the Museum and, on my way in, glanced in the letter box. In it was a tumbled collection of all sorts of exciting looking objects. There were 4 clay pipe bowls from c. 1720; a penknife - the sort which has a spike for removing stones from horses hooves; a beautifully crafted corkscrew designed to disappear into its own handle; 40 Brook Bond "cigarette" cards; and several glass

microscope slides with sections of a rat's tail, young oysters, a midge and a dung-hill fly. Missing completely was any indication of who had pushed these goodies through the letter box or any guidance as to where they had come from. Since then, I had hoped that I might hear who it was who was kind enough to give them to the Museum - but there has been only silence. If it was you please do get in touch. I would love to know more.

In November we had another strange and unusual donation. I was asked whether I would like to have a look at a 1926 General Strike newspaper. "I certainly would", I said. A couple of days later a gentleman thrust an envelope into my hand with the newspaper in it - which did indeed turn out to be most interesting. "There are a couple of other oddments in the envelope as well", I was told. "If you don't want them, just throw them away".

One of the oddments was a much folded document which appeared to have been written in what could easily be 18th century handwriting. The writing itself is reasonably clear though there are holes in the document at the junctions of the folds and it must, at some stage, have come apart into 4 strips because it is sewn together with fine stitches of thin thread. As a result, it is not always easy to read, but the words at the head of the document appear to say "*A Cobby of a Letter which was found under a Stone at a foot of a Cross in a Village called Marton near a Down called Decembry written with Jesus Christ's own hand In Letters of Gold*".

The letter which follows, which is more 17th than 18th century stylistically, is a pretty

vehement exhortation to sin no more, to *“fast on the first five Fridays of the year in remembrance of the five wounds which I suffered”* with the rider that *“any who murmur against the writing and say that it was not written with my own hand shall be cursed”*. Having gone on in this way for some time, at one stage threatening to send “blak worms” to anyone who does not believe, it winds up by saying *“and if a woman [is] labouring with child, having the writtings about her, without doubt she shall be speedy delivered.”*

It is, effectively, a form of lucky charm to have with you in times of stress and difficulty. The only thing to add is that this is probably not a Sussex document in its origins. We are trying to discover where there is a “Down called Decembry” near a village called Marton. Do any of our readers know?

The AGM

The annual General Meeting will be held in the Penfold Hall at 2.30pm on 20th March. As in the past, the business part of the meeting (reports and elections) will be followed by tea and a talk. This year, our speaker is Ian Gledhill, and his talk is a lighthearted look at seaside entertainment in Sussex over the years, from bathing machines to the End of Pier shows. It will be of special interest to us as he has promised to include Gert and Daisy. Ian Gledhill is an entertaining speaker so it should be an interesting and amusing occasion. Please come along.

The Snowdrop

The recent prolonged period of snow over late December and early January has been reported as the most severe in the south east since 1963. Neither event, however, could match the severity of the weather which struck Lewes in the winter of 1836. The event has been referred to in a couple of BBC television programmes in the last year, but for those of you who didn't see them, it seems an appropriate time to repeat the story.

Prolonged snowfall was experienced in

Sussex at Christmas time in 1836 and by the 26th December a north-easterly blizzard had built up a deep layer of snow above Lewes on the top of Cliffe Hill. At the time, the main way into Lewes from Seaford and Newhaven lay along what is now South Street. The route ran beneath Cliffe Hill, and travellers must have seen that the blizzard had built up an overhanging “cornice” of snow on the cliff edge reported as being 15 to 20 feet thick.

At the foot of the cliff lay a row of seven cottages, Boulder's Row, but the inhabitants resisted efforts of neighbours to persuade them to move out, despite the immediate danger they could see building on the cliff-top above. The first sign of impending disaster was when a small avalanche struck on the 26th December, burying a timber yard beneath falling snow. The Boulder Row residents, however, still refused to move out. That proved to be a fatal decision, for the whole of the overhanging cornice fell in a massive avalanche at 10am on 27th December. According to witnesses, the cottages were bodily swept into the road by a gigantic wave of snow, leaving nothing visible except an enormous white mound of snow.

Eight people suffocated beneath the snow, but seven were fortunately saved after a rescue and relief effort lasting seven hours. The dead and injured were moved to the local workhouse.

There remain only two pieces of physical evidence of the terrible event: a foundation stone unearthed when a new house was being erected on the site of Boulder Row, and a white dress belonging to two-year-old Fanny Boakes who was fortunately rescued. The event is commemorated in a contemporary painting by the landscape artist, Thomas Henwood, which can be seen in Anne of Cleves House in Lewes, where Fanny's dress is also to be found. Perhaps the most readily recognised commemoration for us today is the Snowdrop pub, built on the site of the disaster.

Tony Ketterman (Editor)