

Times Past

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STORRINGTON & DISTRICT MUSEUM
Preserving Yesterday for Tomorrow

A New Decade

In this edition Jeremy Knight, Curator of Horsham Museum, maps out the way forward for our Museum, and we look back to an eventful first ten years in the Old School

On the Shoulders of Giants

...is an apt expression in this the 350th year of the foundation of the Royal Society, whose greatest scientist Newton used it, though the origins go back to the twelfth century. It is also an apt expression for what is happening to Storrington Museum. The changes set out below are only possible because of the founding fathers of the Museum. If they had not put the hours in, shown the inspiration and dedication, as well as belief that Storrington should and must have a museum, we would not be here today. In some respects though, the other analogy is that of a child: the Museum has had its birth and childhood, it now needs to move on and branch out in new directions, to join in with the other members of the museum world, rather than stay isolated and fine in its own sphere but not able to hold its head up.

For at least 12 years I have been a distant observer of Storrington Museum, not wanting to interfere or pass comment but willing when possible to support the Museum with the donation of display cases and the loan of items for display. However, this changed when I was asked to help Sue become curator. So it was that in September I visited the Museum to talk to the trustees and saw at once that it had to change if it was to grow and flourish in the next ten years and beyond. It had to move from being a hobby to being a museum. Being a hobby is fine for those whose hobby it is, but when they can no longer devote time to it, the museum dies. A museum has to exist as an entity outside the personalities that set it up or



run it. For that to happen it has to have a structure and purpose based on good practice and in effect the 'right thing to do'. A museum that has 800 visitors a year could not expect a grant of £40,000 from the Heritage Lottery Fund — a subsidy of £500 per visitor.

This led to a re-appraisal of every aspect of the Museum's work, moving away from relying on

Above:
New Lights for Old:
Storrington Museum
in September 2009
and during renovation
in April 2010.

people's memories on what they think is best, to what is best based on years of experience and that of hundreds of curators and museum workers. So what were and are the changes required?

First, the Museum has to encourage repeat visits. The view, 'I saw it once last year; do I need to see it again?' needs to change to 'What's Storrington Museum got on this weekend?'

Then a proper catalogue of the Museum's collections is required, setting out the following information:

- The Accession Number, in a universal numbering system that everyone understands
- A description of the item
- The status of the item – a donation, bequest, loan
- Donor Information, including the donor's name and address
- Any additional information – background, context, etc.
- Location – where it is stored. The store has to be mapped with each shelf and box numbered for ease of identification and access

While all the backroom stuff has to be done, if no one comes through the door, or when they do venture in, they do not understand what you are showing and why, it is a meaningless exercise. It was clear that the displays needed to change – there was too much on display and too many assumptions made about what

your visitors would know. We are doing a new display on horse metalwork. I showed three designers in their twenties a stirrup and no one knew what it was, but equally I would not know what they use every day. This is not 'dumbing down' but realising that the world has seen a massive explosion in knowledge and we can not assume things are obvious.

Reducing the amount of items on display means that new temporary exhibitions can be created. You can better conserve and care for your collections, and with the new stores sorted you can find items on request. Visitors can actually follow the story without being distracted. (Think of documentaries: you watch one on, say, farming, but you do not expect suddenly to jump to transatlantic passenger ships.)

So the Museum is in effect being split in half. One side will be devoted to temporary exhibitions on subjects that visitors will want to see – this means working with community groups in Storrington and district as they will visit and bring in friends and family to see them. The other half will be a permanent exhibition that includes elements that can change.

Then there are the volunteers who work at the Museum. The Museum had expected things of the stewards and officers which on duty of care, good practice and enjoyment made it necessary to change. A happy steward is a happy visitor, who will in return act as an ambassador. This means that stewards will be working in pairs and should have a 'knowledge book' telling them what is on display, how to do things, etc..

For all of this and a lot more to happen the Museum had to close until 1 April 2010, but owing to the bad weather in January that has moved to 9 May 2010.

So the 2010s are the teenage years of Storrington Museum and just as teenagers want to experience new things and do their own stuff, so the Museum has the opportunity to explore and experiment with exhibitions, projects etc, leading on to a strong secure future when it reaches adulthood, hopefully in three or four years' time. Being a museum we do not go in for the modern view of teenagers being children till they are 18, but of being adults going out to work at 14.

Right: Storrington and District Museum's contribution to the Warminghurst Christmas tree festival.

Sue and Paul Setford decorated the tree with images from the Museum and its archive, to excellent effect as can be seen here.



The Story So Far



It is easy to forget that the first thoughts of a Storrington museum go back as far as 1946, when some Indian curios were left as a legacy to be put on exhibition. The issue was debated periodically by the Parish Council over the following half century without progress, and it was only after pressure applied by Joan Ham that the Council agreed in 1998 to support in principle the idea of a museum. Storrington and District Museum was formed without a home the following year, and *Times Past* began publication.

After attempts to establish the Museum at 13 Church Street came to nothing, in 2000 a room in the Old School was granted on annual licence. The official opening was on Easter Monday that year, and the Friends of Storrington and District Museum began their programmes. At the heart of the collection was an extraordinary range of local items from the Greenfield family. For 130 years their Storrington emporium supplied local people with virtually all they needed from cradle to grave, and fortunately for the Museum little was thrown away. Another display to grow quickly was the popular Flower Fairies collection.

The last ten years at the Old School make impressive reading. Alongside the Museum itself, manned by a large body of volunteers, there is a busy programme of lectures, visits and other events. There is a large archive, several databases have been established and the Museum has its own website. Educational outreach grew rapidly at first, with Storrington First School displaying a prize-winning Tudor farmhouse model, and Museum visits by school parties. Regrettably, new draconian insurance requirements for liability cover put an end to these visits. An oral history project has been

launched, and annual family history days have proved very popular.

Among the many highlights have been: in 2002 a Roman march; a re-enactment of Dad's Army in 2003; a Victorian Harvest Home Festival in 2006; Meg Everitt's visit to Cowdray as Queen Elizabeth I in 2007; and the Museums at Night event in 2009 for Culture 24.

Storrington and District Museum has set out to bring history to life through the stories of local people, and it has thrived because so many interesting local people have given of their time and knowledge. Among all these one - Joan Ham - deserves special mention. Without her dedication to the enterprise and unique understanding and knowledge, little would have been achieved. As it is, now that the Museum is putting on a new face for a new decade, we can genuinely say that it has already done much to fulfil its objective of 'preserving yesterday for tomorrow'.

Left: Ancient Romans invade the Museum.

Below: the Dad's Army event and the Victorian Harvest Home.





Above:
Brinkwells in 2010.

Famous Residents No. 9

Philip Beaumont on Edward Elgar's wartime escape to West Sussex

Anyone who lives near Fittleworth will know of Amen Corner and the assumed reason for its name. Driving to Petworth you come to a dangerous corner where you must go right, praying as you do that you avoid the oncoming traffic from Petworth. You are now moving towards the beautiful woodland area called Bedham Woods. Before reaching that superb area for walking notice a sign pointing to what seems an impassable jungle, exactly the sort of place where normal people would be unlikely to choose to live. Why then did England's most admired composer of the 20th century choose to do so? And why in the dark days of the First World War did he and his wife Alice find life so intolerable that a derelict rural slum was preferable to the capital?

Sir Edward was 55 years old when the Great War began but felt he should 'do his bit' for the war effort—but what? His first idea, special constable, caused some amusement among his friends. They could not see him, truncheon at the ready, arresting a German spy or trying to persuade a crowd of drunks to go home to their wives and children.

Wartime London, especially by 1917 with constant bombing by airships, became intolerable

to Edward and Alice. He wanted a country home where he could compose in peace and only his friends could visit him. His dream was to compose works that existed only in his mind. Critics claim that some of his best works were composed at Brinkwells, including the Violin Sonata, the String Quintet and some of the Cello Concerto. Where was there such a place and would it be sufficiently private? (In this respect he was like A.J. Cronin, who sought a home close to London yet far enough distant to ensure that he could write his Dr Finlay stories etc. in peace and without the attention of his growing public. Cronin bought Sullington Rectory where he soon concluded that fame and fortune carries too high a price!)

Fortunately, Elgar had a friend—the painter, Vicat Cole—who wished to leave his studio at Brinkwells for a better one nearby. Elgar was delighted to rent Brinkwells, and saw the attached studio as a perfect place to concentrate on his music. His wife was less pleased. Brinkwells had no water, except from a well, no bathroom or means of heating the water, and the toilet was a deep hole in the garden! But Elgar was delighted at the chance to resume his work anyway from the big city. With or without the war, his background was that of a reluctant exile from his beloved Malvern hills. He saw a few friends who might have to walk from Pulborough station and were unlikely to put up at Brinkwells. He developed an interest in wildlife and enjoyed the rough life of a countryman until the war ended. No doubt pressure from Alice influenced his decision to return to his work in London.

The new Wembley Stadium (now the OLD one!) was opened by King George in 1924. A lavish programme included a performance, by massed choirs and orchestra, of Elgar's stirring *Pomp and Circumstance* no. 1, now sung lustily at every Last Night of the Proms and many sporting occasions as 'Land of Hope and Glory'. Elgar felt that such sentiments did not fit with his music, especially after the obscene slaughter of the Great War. As the moment for this item approached, Sir Edward rose from his seat and left the new stadium, and walked about until the next item began.

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