



Newsletter Autumn 2020

An update from the Chairman

Under normal circumstances the museum would be at the end of its summer season and this newsletter would be reporting on all the events that had taken place. But of course, circumstances are not normal and for various reasons the museum had to stay closed to visitors. It takes about four weeks to set up an exhibition, many new hygiene and safety procedures needed to be put in place and the majority of our volunteers and attendants are over seventy, so it was the only sensible option. Around half of all Essex museums were able to open at some stage during the summer. We were very disappointed that we couldn't be among them.

Over the summer there was a flood of information about the requirements expected if the museum were to open up in the autumn and we did everything necessary, such a risk assessment and the provision of sanitising equipment. However, it soon became clear that even if up to thirty people were allowed to meet indoors with social distancing, it would be unfeasible to hold our usual programme of monthly talks and sadly had to cancel the booked speakers, who hope to return one day. Also our usual lettings of the main hall to local clubs and societies could not go ahead. How many people would want to come in the circumstances? We couldn't safely provide refreshments from our small galley and even cushions would have to be banned from our hard green chairs for hygiene purposes. Ouch!

As autumn approached we made plans to open up the resource centre on some Saturday mornings. Numbers would have to be kept down and it wouldn't be quite the same friendly gathering that has become so popular in recent years but at least it would be a chance for people to meet up again, even with no coffee and biscuits. Then came the "rule of six" which put paid to that. It may still be possible for members of the Mersea Archives Research Group (MARG) to meet up on a rota system, but it looks like any other activities will have to wait until we see what happens in the spring.

Of course we were unable to hold our popular Heritage Open Days at the barrow and would have enjoyed a lovely sunny weekend.

Some positive news

It's not all bad. Tony Millatt has been busy all summer adding many interesting historical items to the website, which you can find listed on the Home Page.

www.merseamuseum.org.uk

The outside of the museum has had a facelift thanks to Graham Hewes kindly giving up his time to give new coats of paint and varnish to the doors and metalwork. Thanks also to Peter Rudlin for renovating the fence and tidying the garden, and Alan Cooke for helping with the jobs. The two Strood Soldiers are also in position at the museum entrance together with Chrissie Westgate's atmospheric photograph, taken before they were all removed. What a pity visitors can't see it yet.

Archaeology news

The boards from the bronze age walkway had completed the preservation process and were ready to be collected from Portsmouth when lockdown came – so they are stuck there for the time being. Also the two bronze age cremation burials found at East Mersea last year are now sitting at UCL waiting for the students to continue their conservation work. CITiZAN has funding to do more work on the island, particularly mapping changes in the coastline at Monkey Beach and Cudmore Grove. They are keen to get input from the locals so if you would like to know more, find them on Facebook at Mersea Island Coastal Memories. Before lockdown they were taking some core samples from the strood which might prove to be interesting, but again they are sitting in a lab somewhere awaiting analysis.

You will remember the large amphora that stands in a case just inside the museum. We have always been proud of this as it is thought to be the largest intact example in Britain. It was always assumed to be a "Roman" type of amphora from the western Mediterranean area. However, we have had a visit from archaeologist Dr Michael Walsh who is 100% certain that it is in fact from the eastern Mediterranean because of the unusual style of the handles, and he said such an amphora has never been found so far into north western Europe. How did it come to be dredged up by an unknown fisherman along the east coast in the 1940s? Unfortunately we have very sketchy details of its provenance but we look forward to hearing more from Dr Walsh in due course.

We are in for a very quiet few months but we hope our members will not forget the museum. To contact us for any reason please email info@merseamuseum.org.uk

We look forward to seeing you again next year, all being well.

Joanne Godfrey