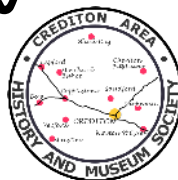


Crediton Area History & Museum Society



www.creditonhistory.org.uk



Members
and
Friends
Newsletter
Spring
2023

CREDITON AND THE GREAT FIRE OF 1743

This year's exhibition is woven around Crediton's Great Fire of 1743, that destroyed so much of the town and left hundreds of residents homeless.

The exhibition opens on **Wednesday 19th April**, running through to **October**. Our normal opening days and times will be **Wednesdays, Thursdays, Fridays 10:00am – 4:00pm** and **Saturdays 11:00am – 2:00pm**. Admission is free, but donations are (always) welcome.

The Fire was reported as being particularly dramatic and destructive. The events of 1743 were well-recorded and we have an unusually detailed town map from that year, commissioned by the then Lord of the Manor, wealthy London merchant William Strode, to identify encroachments onto the highway that enabled traders to avoid his market tolls. CAHMS' book *Crediton & the Great Fire of 1743* will use that map - along with a mass of information and a number of tales we have unearthed about Crediton in and around the 1740s - to tell the story of the town and its people before, during and after the Great Fire.

We've had a fantastic response to our subscription offer on the book, and will have more copies for sale at the exhibition. Copies can be purchased at the exhibition (paperback @ £15, hardback @ £25), but if you wish to order a copy contact us at info@creditonhistory.org.uk.

Because we wanted to display a larger copy of the 1743 map (re-scanned by Exeter University last year to a much higher resolution) than that which has been on display on the mezzanine since 2016, it was necessary to make space by moving the high street model and its cabinet from the south wall to the west wall, and what a challenging task - carried out principally by Keith Mortimer and David Nation - that turned out to be! The daunting task of removing and replacing the cabinet's laminated glass panels was carried out by Crediton builder S.J. Willis & Sons, without charge to CAHMS. Thankyou Steve!

The exhibition has been sponsored by Ashgrove Kitchens, Charlesworth Nichols Solicitors, Crediton Dairy, Sandford Orchards and The Bike Shed, Val Barker Jewellers, Crediton Town Council and Devon County Council, without whose generous help the exhibition would have been much reduced.



Where the fire began, Lloyds Bank now stands there.



TUDOR TAXES AND GEORGIAN FIRES.

CAHMS' very well attended March meeting (see the photo!) was two talks in one. Well-known historian Dr. Todd Gray spoke first, about the recent publication of the third volume of *Devon Parish Taxpayers*, by the Devon & Cornwall Record Society, which includes a substantial section on Crediton in the 1500s and early 1600s. CAHMS member Tony Gale then spoke about our forthcoming exhibition and book, and the research that has gone into it, by Tony himself, archivist and member Elly Babbege, Past Chairman John Heal, and historic buildings expert Peter Child.

MUSEUM FINDS DAY November 22

A well-attended 'Finds Day' organised by CAHMS member Tony Gale in partnership with the Portable Antiquities Scheme (PAS), was held in the museum on November 22, when Finds Officer Rob Webley from RAMM in Exeter, attended to inspect a wide variety of finds brought in by local people, as well as a few from further afield.

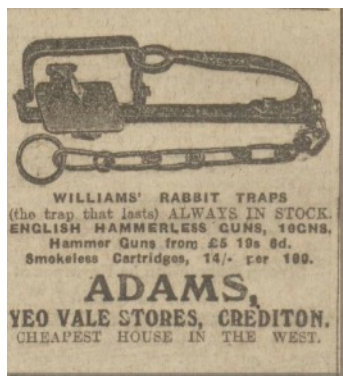


Rob Webley at work.

The scheme aims to encourage the recording of archaeological objects found by members of the public in England and Wales. Every year many thousands of archaeological objects are discovered, many of them by metal detector users, but also by people whilst out walking, gardening or going about their daily work. Finds recorded with the Scheme help advance knowledge of the history and archaeology of England and Wales (see the PAS website finds.org.uk).

Important local finds included an early 18th century "onion" bottle; some fragments of highly-decorated pottery from the same era; a gun flint from a nearby farm; and what just might be a Roman coin found in a garden on the edge of Crediton. Another local find discovered in the roofspace of a cottage at Copplestone, was a rabbit trap from the 1920s. "I was bowled over to be shown a 1921 newspaper advert for Adams 'Yeo Vale Stores' of Crediton with a picture of this exact model", said the man who brought it in. And it is possible that the trap was bought from Adams' store!

"It was a very successful day for us," says Rob Webley. "It's always good to make contact with enthusiasts who want to share their finds with us; that's what the scheme is all about. We are very



The Adams 1921 advert.

keen to encourage responsible detectorists and people who just notice things which might be interesting, and work with them to build our database of finds which help us to learn more about the past." Some of the finds need further analysis with experts in various fields. "We'll be keeping in touch with Rob and the team at PAS," says Tony, "hoping to learn more about our local discoveries. With any luck we will have some new finds to add to the display in next summer's exhibition at the museum, focusing on Crediton and the Great Fire of 1743.

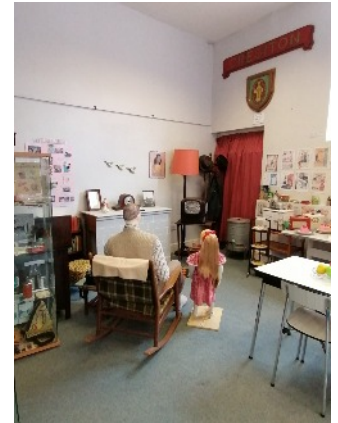
Tony Gale

BACK TO THE FIFTIES

Elsewhere in this newsletter you will read about this year's exhibition, but it is worth reflecting on last year's exhibition "Back to the Fifties", which was held over because of the Covid lockdowns that we all had to endure. It featured all manner of what now seem antiquated technology, that fascinated and challenged the younger generations.



KITCHEN SCENE



LOUNGE SCENE

The exhibition was open between Easter and the end of October and attracted over 1400 visitors, which is higher than in previous years. This was despite closures for the Queen's Platinum Jubilee and the mourning period following her death. In addition to visits from local people, we recorded visits from all over the UK as well as Australia, Japan and the USA. Covering so many aspects of life in the 1950's it brought back many memories for older visitors, as well as curiosity from our younger visitors who enjoyed completing treasure hunts around the museum and working out how a dial telephone or manual typewriter worked. Cheryl was also able to demonstrate her shorthand skills!

YEOFORD SCHOOL VISIT

In October children from Yeoford School visited the museum for talks on life in Devon in WW2. They learned about life in Yeoford and evacuees, from letters written at the time by a family living in



Yeoford and from memories written by past staff at the school. In the afternoon they learned about food rationing and guessed that carrots were the secret ingredient that supplemented sugar in the cookies they tasted. Before leaving they had fun exploring the 1950s exhibition!

MISS SEARLE'S SWEET SHOP - Part Five
Concluding the reminiscences of Phyllis Wreyford (nee Searle) who was born on the 21 July 1916 at 27 High Street (known to many as Miss Searle's sweet shop) and died in 1993.

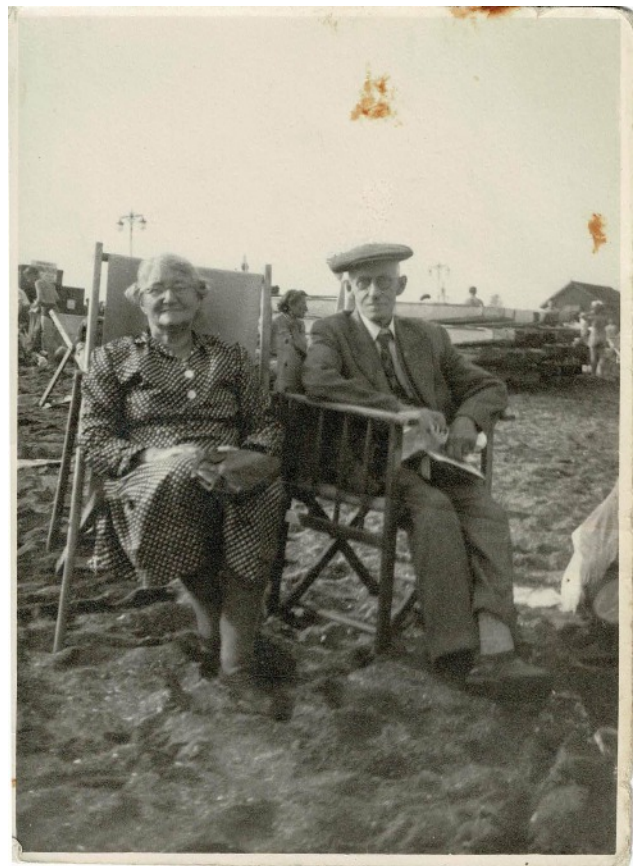
Out & About, then off to work.

When I was about 10, Auntie Trewin suggested my being allowed to spend a couple of weeks with her whilst she was staying with Aunt 'Bill' (Priscilla) at Plymouth – they were sisters-in-law and each year they visited each other. I was taken to Crediton station and put in the guard's van to be looked after until we got to Mutley station where I was met by Auntie. At that time Uncle Ned – Aunt Bill's husband was a warden in Plymouth prison. He was very jolly and quite amusing, and liked his 'liquor'; Eddie their son was about my age. Aunt Bill being Cornish took pride in making pasties, and during the school holidays they used to pack a picnic lunch and take Eddie and I on a boat trip to Bovisand or Jennycliff which we enjoyed.

Farmer's wife, Mrs. Down brought weekly supplies of home made dairy butter etc. to mother's shop. Her husband was a very old fashioned man, very narrow minded – he used to call a pack of cards 'The Devil's Book'. Enid was to attend the High School, but there were no school dinners then, the girls who lived away had to bring their own food.

It was quite a sensation when double decker buses were first introduced to Crediton and it was exciting riding upstairs; we went to see Al Johnson in our first "talking" picture - 'Singing Fool' and the leading song was 'Sonny Boy'. I know I was deeply impressed at the American accents in the film, because remember there was no TV films or plays from America and it seemed their voices were much deeper than English actors.

My friend during the final years at school was Freda Discombe, who lived a few doors away from Auntie. She took a typing and shorthand course at Fulfords College in Exeter, and worked as a secretary at Jacksons



William and Eliza on the beach at Exmouth in 1947

factory. I should have liked to do the same, but my parents arranged for a woman in Crediton to teach me shorthand, and after a few months she arranged to hire a typewriter for a 'month' so that I could type a letter. After that she came with me for an interview to work in Cornish's the outfitters in Exeter where she said I would gain experience of office work. It was long hours – I had to catch the 8.15 bus in the morning and catch the 7.05 bus home in the evening, and Saturday we had to work 8pm and catch the 8.20 bus home. We used to enjoy meeting the other staff when we had dinner and tea breaks in the little tower at the top of Cornish's. We went on an outing to Cornwall whilst I was there, it was their 50th year of trading I think. I joined the tennis club at the Liberal Club, as Freda suggested I came with her.

FORTHCOMING EVENTS

CAHMS events commence at 7.30pm at the Boniface Centre and include refreshments, £1.00 for members; £4.00 for non-members. For more details and to keep up to date, visit "Whats On" on our website.

- 19 April** "Crediton and the Great Fire of 1743" CAHMS exhibition opens in the Museum at 10am and runs to 28 October. 10am-4pm Wednesday - Friday; 11am-2pm Saturdays
- 21 April** "Researching the history of your house" A South West Heritage Trust online talk. Details and booking information: <https://swheritage.org.uk/events/house-history/>

- 24 April** Catastrophe at Hayne Bridge and William Bibbings. A Bow & District History Society (BDHS) event.
- 29 April** "1920s Houses." A Symposium presented by the Devon History Society and the Devon Buildings Group.
- 13 May** Devon & Cornwall Record Society 2023 Annual General Meeting. AGM followed by conference "The Cloth Book of Claude Passavant of Exeter, 1763-6"
- 26 June** "The Remarkable Pinwill sisters" A BDHS event. Talk on the "Lady Woodcarvers". Coldridge church visit. A BDHS event.
- 27 July** events at the Village Hall. Non-members £3.00

CHRISTMAS MEAL

Because of rising prices, this year's CAHMS Christmas meal was held in the museum on Friday 9th December. 34 of us attended - which is many more than in recent years - and we tucked in to a terrific buffet meal of savouries and desserts provided by Wendy Denford, late of Treloars Delicatessen. The room was decorated by Cheryl Lewis and Mavis Monaghan (pictured) and Cheryl also organised a quiz.



Cheryl and Mavis relaxing for once!

GILL PONSFORD

It was with great sadness that we heard that Gill passed away on Sept 15th after a very short illness. I have known Gill since 1995 and we served together on Crediton Town Council for several years. She was totally committed to the town of her birth and was very proud that generations of her ancestors (Manns) had lived within a stones throw of where she always lived. As soon as we set up our 'Friends of Crediton Museum' group I had no hesitation in suggesting to Gill that she might like to join. She did so and continued to support us all along. She occasionally loaned items for display, including a Crediton fireman's helmet that I think belonged to her great grandfather.



Gill contributed a huge amount to the town over many years and will be sadly missed. We sent our deepest sympathies to her husband Norman and family and are so sorry that Gill will be unable to join us at next year's 1743 Great Fire project because I know this would have fascinated her and she would have wanted very much to be associated with it.

David Nation
Chair CAHMS

Chairman's chatter

Just as we began to think the pandemic was all over it seems to be rearing its ugly head again. Thankfully, those of us who have been jabbed no longer seem to be as badly affected when we do catch it but regrettably your Chair's household recently had to go into hiding with it recently. This meant that we missed the very well attended Talks on 17 March by Tony Gale and Dr Todd Gray. I wasn't surprised to hear that the Talks were very well received. Tony, of course, has largely been responsible for the research behind the 1743 Great Fire of Crediton, the subject of our exhibition which opens on 19 April at the museum. Any talk by Todd is always captivating and we are indeed fortunate that his recent research had such a Crediton focus, unearthing and examining material few of us even knew existed!



A very positive recent development has been the influx of several new volunteers, some with specialist computer skills, which is enabling us to progress cataloguing our collection much more rapidly. More volunteers and stewards always needed at the museum. Please get in touch if you are at all interested.

David Nation
Society Chairman.

www.creditonhistory.org.uk

This is the address of the museum website. It contains information about local history, an up to date diary of events and links to other museum websites.

PHOTOGRAPHIC ARCHIVE

We have an archive of more than 1000 photos in the museum. Copies of many are available to purchase. Contact us through our website.

Our Corporate Friends

Please don't forget to support the local firms whose logos appear in our literature - see below. Without them we would not have a museum. Our income is insufficient to cover the expenses.

Crediton Museum
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