

Crediton Area History & Museum Society



www.creditonhistory.org.uk



**Members
and
Friends
Newsletter
May
2026**

“THE CREDITON AREA - A HISTORY IN 21 OBJECTS”

This year's exhibition started later than usual on the 15 April due to the untimely passing of CAHMS' chairman Tony Gale.

Tony was the driving force behind the exhibition, which is entitled “The Crediton Area - A history in 21 Objects”, and because he had been working on his vision for many weeks before his illness took hold, most of the text for the book that will accompany the exhibition was complete, and it is in the process of being edited prior to publication. CAHMS' Education Officer Cheryl Lewis pulled all the stops out to complete the exhibition in Tony's memory, ably assisted by CAHMS members David Nation and David Cann.

One of the oldest artefacts in the exhibition is the top part of a quern stone, used to grind corn two thousand years ago.

This was one of the discoveries made during the archaeological excavations carried out by Bellway Homes at their Creedy Bridge development site on the northern side of Crediton.

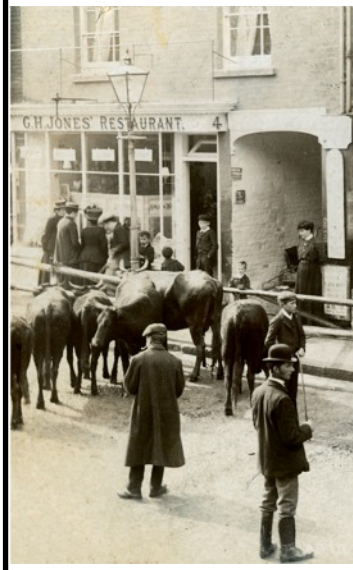
Other artefacts found include Mesolithic worked flints five-six thousand years old, which were found very close to the remains of two roundhouses, illustrated here

with Cheryl Lewis's model of what a round house may have looked like, with its low stone walls, steeply pitched, thatched roof and smoke hole in the ridge.



4 HIGH STREET, CREDITON

One of the exhibition's most prominent displays is this interactive model of No. 4 High Street. Tony Gale's daughter Ella set up the iPad “windows” loaded with historic photos, and her partner Fred Styler designed and built the very realistic shop front.



The sepia image reveals that No. 4 was once a restaurant, for a few years around 1910. From 1914 onwards it was occupied by Sydney Berry as a stationer, tobacconist, photographer, and newsagent.

More recently and to the present day, it has been occupied by Once Read antiquarian bookseller which is about to change ownership due to retirement.

“7 MILES TO EXON”

Many of us drive past this part of Crediton's history every day without realising it. Nestling amongst the weeds by the disused Wellparks farmhouse is this ancient milestone.



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MOVING OUT OF DOWNES AND INTO THE TOWN COUNCIL SECOND FLOOR OFFICES IN NORTH STREET.

For the last thirty years CAHMS – which was established in 1984 – has had the use of rent-free rooms at Downes House, courtesy of Downes Estate's Mrs. Rosemary Parker who died in 1997, and after her death, her son Henry Parker. In 2024, in accordance with our lease, the Estate gave us twelve months notice to quit, expiring in October 2025. With large quantities of historic artifacts, papers, drawings and maps stored there this gave us a real headache. But with a good deal of hard work by members – in the process discovering items we either didn't know we had or had forgotten about, numerous boxes of historic papers were scanned before being taken to the Devon Heritage Centre at Sowton for safe



The North Street offices



The guano cleaners

storage there. Artefacts we no longer had anywhere to keep were offered to other museums, sold at auction or disposed of.

Meanwhile we were able to lease second floor rooms in the Town Council's new offices in North Street (grandly named by us "The Penthouse"). Before we could occupy the rooms however we had to remove pigeon guano from the floor boards (!) and put up handrails on the staircases. The main room is now in use for cataloguing documents, and for housing artefacts being kept in Crediton. The downside to these new rooms is the challenging access to them from the first floor, which some members have found too difficult and so are unable to work in them.

We are indebted to Adam Partridge Auctioneers of Hele, Exeter who auctioned many items without charging commission. Also to Emma Phillips, landlord at the Ship Hotel who kindly used her van and staff to help members move artifacts from Downes to the Penthouse. Not forgetting of course CAMHS members David Nation, David Cann and Martin Benwell who cleaned the floors, somehow carried plan chests and other furniture up the very difficult staircase and fixed handrails.

We are now settled in to "The Penthouse", which enables us to get on with our work.



Exhausted furniture movers

FORTHCOMING EVENTS

CAHMS events (CAHMS events unless stated) commence at 7.30pm at the Boniface Centre, with refreshments at 7.15; £2.00 for members; £5.00 for non-members. For more details and to keep up to date, visit "Whats On" on our website.

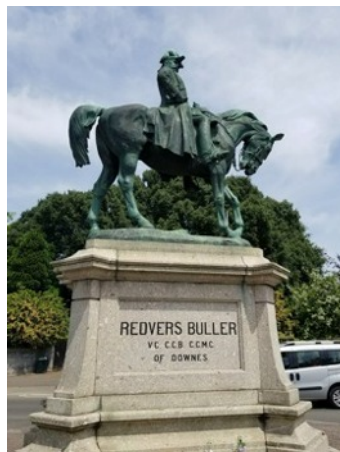
- 15 Apr to 31 Oct "The Crediton Area - A History in 21 Objects" CAHMS exhibition in the Old Town Hall.
- 22 June "The Ordeal of Miss Lucy Jones" A novel based on a true story set in Torrington in the 19th century, by the author Elizabeth Shakespeare. (BDHS event).
- 27 July Visit to Fursdon House. DETAILS TO FOLLOW. (BDHS event)
- 14 Sept 7pm CAHMS AGM followed by "Tiverton Family of Boot and Shoemakers" by Ellie Babbage.
- 28 Sept "The St Michael Line" A pilgrimage route across southern England, by Peter & Sue Knight. (BDHS event)

- 12 Oct "Smuggling in Devon..Fact and Fiction" by Robert Hesketh PROVISIONAL ONLY.
 - 26 Oct "The Stone Circles of Northern Dartmoor" by Alan Endacott, founding Curator of The Dartmoor Museum of Country Life. (BDHS)
 - 9 Nov "A Tudor Christmas", by Rosemary Griggs. PROVISIONAL ONLY
 - 23 Nov BDHS AGM and Social Evening. DETAILS TO FOLLOW.
 - 2027
 - 11 Jan "Local archaeological finds", by Dicon Perryman. PROVISIONAL DETAILS.
 - 8 Feb Wessex Archaeology talk on specific local projects.
 - 8 Mar "Local wills", by Laura Sanga.
- Bow and District History Society (BDHS) and Newton St. Cyres History Group (NSTCHG) events in their village halls.

SOLDIER OF THE EMPIRE

A first-hand account of the Boer War.

The following is a summary of an article written by CAHMS member David Nation's nephew Glyn Nation following his research into a hand-written diary belonging to his great grandfather Ed Hammett. Cpl Hammett served in South Africa in the Boer War and was at Ladysmith in 1900 when it was relieved by General Buller. Ed was a tanner born in Exeter in 1876 but the Hammett family lived in



Buller's statue in Exeter

Brampford Speke. He enlisted in the Devonshire regiment in 1894 and left England in 1895 to join the First Battalion on the North West Frontier of India.

In 1899 they were ordered to Natal, South Africa and were soon involved in action against the Boers. In October 1899 the Transvaal Boers advanced towards Ladysmith and took command of a position near Elandslaagte. They closed the line of retreat for the British at Glencoe and Dundee. The Devons, including the 23 year old Hammett, were amongst those ordered to regain Elandslaagte.

The advance began at 1500 hours and as the British moved across the open plain the Boer guns opened fire. With nothing but ant hills for cover, damages were sustained. Whilst the Gordon Highlanders and Manchesters were to attack the Boer left flank, the Devons were to make a frontal attack. Advancing in extended formation the Devons opened fire at around 1,250 yards from the enemy. The weather was closing in and in poor light they reached a position at the foot of the occupied hills. The Devons, with bayonets fixed, charged up and into the Boer stronghold, driving the enemy from their positions and taking possession of their guns. The Devons suffered 33 wounded but the battle had proven a victory for the British. The rejoicing was to be short-lived. Within days they had withdrawn to Ladysmith and were surrounded by the Boers – the siege of Ladysmith had begun.

Over the following months the British repeatedly defended their positions. Fighting not only the Boers but the diminishing supplies and the rising tide of disease, their hopes of freedom lay with General Sir Redvers Buller and his army.

But Buller's progress was slow and erratic and the besieged troops, with their hopes dashed time and again, were to wait until February 28th 1900 before Buller finally entered the town. The delay had cost the garrison of 13,500 a high price. Sickness or injury had, at some time, hospitalised 10,500, 38 had died from shell fire and 430 from disease.

Having survived the siege, Private Hammett returned to Britain on May 31st 1900 and remained until October 16th before returning for a second tour of duty, this time of one month.

He had started his diary on his return to South Africa in 1900, words written in a style of hard and simple facts and bearing a true Devonian slant. With no blatant gripes, he appears to have had an almost casual acceptance of his lot – although the hardships that these men were to endure are gradually revealed. The full story is being lodged in our archive but here are a few snippets:

November 24, 1900: *"5 coys of Devons, 2 coys of Rifles and a battery of artillery went out to a koppe and attacked some Boers."*

November 30: *"Paraded for fatigues at 6.15am and at 10.30 had rifle inspection... (Waited until 2pm before rations arrived from Heidelberg, when each man received) two pints of tea, 4 biscuits and 1lb of mutton"*.

December 1: *"... 5 coys of Devons paraded at 5.50am, the mobile force on the right, the Devons on the left and a force came in from Heidelberg. Attacked in rear, we had big guns, pom poms and maxims. We fought for four hours and took the position..."*

February 8, 1901: *"In the afternoon it came on to rain and we got washed out of our tents"*. February 17: *"It was a very wet day and we only had a big coat and a waterproof sheet and we had it like this for seven days and nights, right off"*.

May 14: (Devons escorted a wagon train) *"We had breakfast at 4am...and got out of camp about a mile, the Boers attacked our rear guard and delayed us for two hours...we had one killed and three wounded and they (Boers) followed us all the way to camp."*

March 21: (On escort duty) *"...we had 19 Boer prisoners...400 horses and 50 wagons of Boer families, altogether we had 400 wagons and we marched 14 miles. We had half a pound of biscuits and 1 tin of jam between 7 men and 1oz. of cheese..."*

We are used to reading learned accounts of conflicts and the strategies of those in command. What we have here is a fascinating account of life for the ordinary soldier.



CREDITON IMPROVEMENT ACT 1836 BOUNDARY PLAN

This plan - a print of which is on display in the museum - is the plan that was produced to show the extent of land within the boundary of the Crediton Improvement Act 1836. The original plan - prepared by Exeter surveyor Murray Vicars in 1836 - is in very poor condition and it is a tribute to the printers that they were able to produce the display copy. The boundary is described in a single sentence in the Act, and extends to 800 words!

THE BATTLE OF COPPLESTONE?

Was Copplestone the site of a fierce battle between the Welsh and the men of Devon in AD 823? The meeting of the of the Devonshire Association held in Kingsbridge in July 1897 a paper by J.M.Martin, Entitled "The Camelford of the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle: Where was it?" suggested this could be the case.



The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle entry for AD 823 states: "Her waes Weala gefeoft and Defna at Gafulforda."

In Petrie's translation, "This year there was a battle between the Welsh and the men of Devon at Camelford," and a note appended to the effect that Camelford was "in Cornwall."

The paper's author suggests, and makes a strong case for a number of other potential sites in Devon for this important battle, one of these is Copplestone, based on the proposition that this would have been more likely and more accessible than a Cornish site.

For me, I would question why the men of Devon would travel. So just maybe the Copplestone Cross/stone marks the place of an important battle and not the death of Bishop Putta.

Answers on a postcard please.

Tony Gale 1951 - 2026

Many of you will have heard that CAHMS Chairman, Tony Gale, passed away at the end of March after a battle with cancer.



Tony had a lifelong interest in history and on his retirement attended Exeter University in order to develop his skillset in researching, presenting and writing about the history of Devon, his native county. Here he was awarded an M.A. in history for his thesis about Crediton in the 16th century.

This year's exhibition at the Museum was conceived, researched and written by Tony, who has worked tirelessly for CAHMS in recent years.

History was Tony's passion and he loved sharing his knowledge in a way that brought stories and people to life. He will be remembered by many for his talks and history walks around the Crediton area. He co-wrote and edited our book on the Great Fire of Crediton and has also written books on the Crediton area.

Tony was a well-known and respected part of Crediton life and he will be greatly missed by many, both on a personal and professional level.

Cheryl Lewis

ACQUISITION OF A CLOCK MADE BY A CREDITON MAKER.

Thanks to the power of the internet and the vigilance of CAHMS member David Cann we became aware that a Victorian fusee clock made by Crediton clockmaker George Webber, was coming up for auction in Barnstaple in September last year.

With the aid of a donation by a member and the remains of a grant from MDDC we were able to purchase the clock, which is now resplendantly hanging in the museum.

"Fusee" describes the winding mechanism, in use from the fifteenth to the early twentieth centuries, which equalised the pull of the mainspring as it ran down.



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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.

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Crediton Museum & Heritage Centre



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