

FRIENDS of HENFIELD MUSEUM

c/o Henfield Parish Council, Coopers Way, Henfield, BN5 9EQ

friendsofhenfieldmuseum@gmail.com

Members' Update - 2023 Retrospective

Dear Members,

Didn't the last year fly! As ever, we've been hard at work on a number of projects, on which updates below. We'd like to sincerely thank all of you for your ongoing support.

We're also very pleased to have welcomed Lyn Sheppard, Roger Noel and Maureen Lucas onto the committee this year – Lyn has kindly taken over the Treasurer's role from Arun Agarwal who we thank for his service since taking over from Conway Thorns at the end of 2018. Committee meets every two months – please do let us know if you have ideas on the below or other projects or would be interested in joining in the future (submissions for future Friends newsletters would also be very much welcomed!).

- **Publications:** *A History of Henfield High Street from the 1800s to the Present-Day* (2022) and *A Tour of Our Commons* (2017) continue to sell well, with thanks to the sterling efforts in this regard by tireless committee member Peter Bates. We have recently reprinted the former to meet demand – hopefully you have yours proudly on the shelf!
- **Greeting cards:** our three new sets are now printed and on sale. Set #1, '*An Edwardian Winter*' features six restored and coloured photos of a wintry Henfield past and made strong Christmas sales. Set #2, '*Threshing by Veronica Burleigh*' features five striking images of steam threshing c. 1930 in the socialist realist style, taken from one of our most eye-catching paintings. Set #3, '*Paintings for the Festival of Britain*', features two each of four paintings of Henfield at various points in history painted by local artist Malcolm Milne for the 1951 festival. We aim to publicise these more in due course hope these will do well over the longer term - please do spread the word if you can.
- **3D scanning:** a means of highlighting and sharing objects in our collection with a worldwide digital audience, our pilot object was a fine [Neolithic Laurel Leaf Spearhead](#) from the museum's collection of flints, carried out by 3Dify in Brighton and then made available online via the SketchFab platform.

We are pleased to have also coordinated via the Sussex Museums Group - with many thanks to Fishbourne Curator Dr. Rob Symmons - for the Palstave axe head to be one of the first items examined at the University of Exeter's new archaeological lab, gratis (see below ref. to Maggie Parnell's 2017 discovery of the axe). [A second 3D scan](#) has also now been produced of the axe – quite the technical evolution from its predecessor above! We hope also to discover the exact elemental composition via Exeter's XRF machine. All going well, this should allow us to discover where the metal of this striking new object in our collection was originally mined.

- **Funding of acquisitions:** in 2023, we continued to contribute funding for acquisitions, the most recent being a 1958 painting of Chanctonbury Ring from the Henfield ridge.
- **Museum website:** we continue to fund and develop this important and successful portal to the museum collection and local history. Additions have been made to multiple areas; Henfieldians Past, guest blogs, additional costume features, restored and colourised photos, artworks, Arborea entries, current and past exhibition information, additional Gift Shop items and local history research amongst others.

Digital visitor numbers remain high, slightly increased from 2022. From Jan-Dec 2023, there were 4376 visits and 11,476 total page views on the museum website. The museum's Google sidebar results were comparable with 2022 - 908 engagements, directing 303 clicks onwards to the website. We additionally host a Henfield History Group page on the site listing their upcoming talks – this had 330 views in 2023.

- **Social media:** work continues, with Facebook particularly continuing to get good engagement. The page in recent months topped 1000 followers, with Twitter/X being on 216 and Instagram on 104.

On Facebook, there were 5.1k total post interactions and 3,182 page visits. Some posts reached over 9000 people, with 'Then & Now' a popular format. In terms of demographics, visitors comprise 66.8% women and 33.2% men, with ages fairly evenly spread, particularly over the 35+ range (reflecting the overall Facebook demographic). The top five visitor locations were: 87.4% UK, 5.2% USA, 1.7% Aus, 0.9 Spain and 0.7% Canada. Stephanie's costume posts continue to draw specialist interest on Facebook.

- **Square contactless payment/online order system:** volunteers are increasingly confident using the system, £657 worth of transactions being processed with it in 2023.
- **Museum digitisation project:** Stages 2 (further scanning of museum artworks) and ultimately 3 (public availability via online portal) are currently under discussion at museum committee. The Friends will likely contribute to this in the long term, but grant funding will be necessary.
- **Project Arborea (The Trees of Henfield):** a quieter year on the submissions front, but more uploads, publicity and perhaps tree walks are planned for 2024. The two donated giant redwoods/*Sequoiadendron gigantea* mentioned in the previous update have had mixed fortunes. That on Stonepit Lane was unfortunately, despite wire protections, devoured by sheep or deer, leaving a bare stick which it seems unlikely will recover. However, its sibling planted in the Community Orchard above Henfield Common has taken very well. The additional precaution of a wired cover over the top has kindly been installed by the village tree wardens. So, this rare tree, while now looking somewhat imprisoned, will hopefully continue to thrive. If you have favourite local trees, please [send them in!](#)
- **Student volunteers:** listing of the museum on Horsham's website has led to several enquiries, one of whom is a Lancing College student who has offered to research and write an article on Nathaniel Woodard using resources from the museum and elsewhere.
- **Talks:** our 2023 AGM was well attended, with an enjoyable talk and display by Margaret Parnell on her local metal detecting finds, focused around the unveiling of the newly acquired Palstave axe head (found by her at Blackstone in 2017). The Chair introduced some broader context and Andrew Sharp then spoke on the bronze casting techniques that would have been used in the Middle Bronze Age. Watch this space in 2024 for a talk of a similar, but larger hidden treasure flavoured nature... Our Christmas party was well attended, with an enjoyable presentation by Curator Alan Barwick on the Steyning Line railway (see photos below), aided by the Deputy Curator's timely sourcing of a replacement HDMI cable!

- **Trips:** we put on an enjoyable summer visit to the Stoneywish Museum/Nature Reserve to view a collection of historic images. The cherry on top was the Rowland Emmett Hut, bringing the whimsical inventor to life with some help from a brief documentary and questions posed to its curator.
- **Digital restoration of photographs and paintings:** continuing as time allows, with images selected from the main and Marjorie Baker collections and then publicised via the museum website & social media. A manual digital repair is carried out, before the *DeOldify* automatic colourisation algorithm is used (this is funded by a volunteer). Manual colourisation repair is then added as needed to finish.
- **Oral histories:** interviews have continued, although more interviewer volunteers are needed. We're also looking for a new project leader - let us know if you can help (this project is often a very fulfilling one!). New recording devices and auto transcribers are now in use which both aid the recording process and promise a speedier path towards organising and making more of the collection easily accessible to the public.
- **The Roving Display Case:** the 2023 display *'Henfield's Nonconformists - a Tale of Religious Freedom'* was kindly hosted by a number of venues this year in addition to the museum – appropriately starting at the Evangelical Free Church, who kindly also lent for the display the original members' book and the brass funerary plaque of the first Pastor's wife! Henfield Library and the Henfield Haven then continued the rove. The project is currently running at about the minimum number of venues to be viable, so please do get in touch if you have any ideas of other local venues that would be willing to take a turn. Our new display for 2024 features the amusement fair at Devil's Dyke – it began its first stint at the Free Church Hall from December 2023.
- **Henfield Village Photo Boards:** a first map-board with a photo medley has been put up in the library car park in a prominent spot on the back of the bus shelter. Plans continue for more at popular Henfield sites, tied in with the local district heritage trails.
- **A Favourite Object:** the project continues, with further submissions added to the webpage. We aim to factor chosen objects into discussions on choices for 3D scanning of selected items from the collection, so submit a favourite object and you may soon see it spinning in virtual space! Forms/info are available in the museum and on [the project webpage](#).
- **Other Research:** research has been undertaken in relation to projects above and as a result of various museum enquiries. In addition to continuations on work from previous years, topics included the Violet Nurseries, Barrow Hill Farm, local etymology, local houses and families. Some will be included as part of projects above, on the website blog or the *Local History Research* page – we have also received several donations to the Friends as a result of this work.
- **Costume** - an update from Costume Curator Stephanie Richards:

'2023 proved to be a very varied year for the costume collection. January and February were mainly taken up with changing the main costume display from reflections on Royal Jubilees to 'New Donations with Vintage Style', showcasing some of the gems that have been added to the collection. Plus the granddaughters of Ethel Botting of Swains Farm visited and examined some of Ethel's sewing exercises. March was the Village Evening and a selection of goods from Hanningtons drew interest to the museum stand. April brought a visit to the collection from a costume academic researching aesthetic dress, while in June I was delighted to welcome a renowned expert on Concealed Garments to discuss the Workhouse Stays.

August was a busy month, bringing two outstanding donations of a 1949 wedding dress and a large portion of a WW2 silk parachute. Both these donations had a wealth of ephemera and family history to support them. I also met the High Sheriff of West Sussex when he visited the museum that month. September's visit was a group led by a local designer, who wished to examine Bishop Wilberforce's waistcoat. November produced two wonderful donations; a Victorian child's bonnet and gloves and a beautifully preserved wedding ensemble from 1919. This last donation came as a direct result of a stand showcasing haberdashery and sewing exercises that I had at a Stash Sale held in the main hall. And that's it! Just remains for me to thank all the other Henfield Museum folk that I have had the pleasure of working with this year.'

- **From the Curator** - last but not least, from Curator Alan Barwick:

'Visitor numbers in 2023 were 1501; about 200 up from the previous year. Age estimates were 194 aged 18 or under, 343 aged 18-50 and 964 aged 50+. There were five temporary exhibitions in place during the year: one dress display ('New Donations with Vintage Style'), three featuring objects from private collections ('Chanctonbury Ring Morris Men: 70th Anniversary Exhibition', 'With Condiments of the Seasoning' and 'The Hobby of Bottle Collecting'), and 'Henfield's Environs' with photographs of Henfield and the surrounding villages. We are always pleased to host exhibitions of private collections.

An oil painting showing a view of the South Downs from Henfield was acquired through an auction. We continue to get items offered to the museum, but our collections policy only allows us to accept items which have a connection to Henfield or the surrounding villages.

We have a full contingent of regular museum volunteers, and others on our reserve list. A big thank you must go out to all of them, because without their support the museum could not function.

The museum is a member of The Sussex Museums Group, and representatives from the museum attend their meetings every few months. We are also a member of a smaller local group of museums comprising, Horsham, Christ's Hospital, Steyning, Storrington, and Amberley. The main purpose of this group is to look at ways of working together and promoting museums in the Horsham district.

The museum continues to offer support to local schools, providing people with information on their properties and family histories, and giving guided historical walks around the village.'

Our year end bank balance stood at a healthy £4422, with books and greeting cards selling well. Our membership stood at around 70 paid members.

We very much hope that you will continue your membership, spread the word of our work and continue to highlight Henfield history - we look forward to seeing you at the AGM in April (TBC Wed 17th April).

With best wishes,



Robert Gordon (Chair)

On behalf of the Friends of Henfield Museum Committee

Moments from 2023

The Christmas Party



The 2023 Christmas party and talk by Alan Barwick on the Horsham – Shoreham railway. Photos c/o Mike Dixon & R. Gordon.





A Henfield Christmas Party Past



This photo was taken at Dr. John Squire's children's Henfield clinic Christmas party in Dec. 1954. Names noted on the back are (from the right) Dr. Squire, Sister Cutting, Mary Anne Kent, Gerald Castledine, Geoff Fairs, Thelma Haffenden, Brian Shann, John Sayers, Sister Badley(?), C. Jones, Linda Bailey, Mrs. Alistair Knee Knee, Ann Lyons, Kevin Lyons.

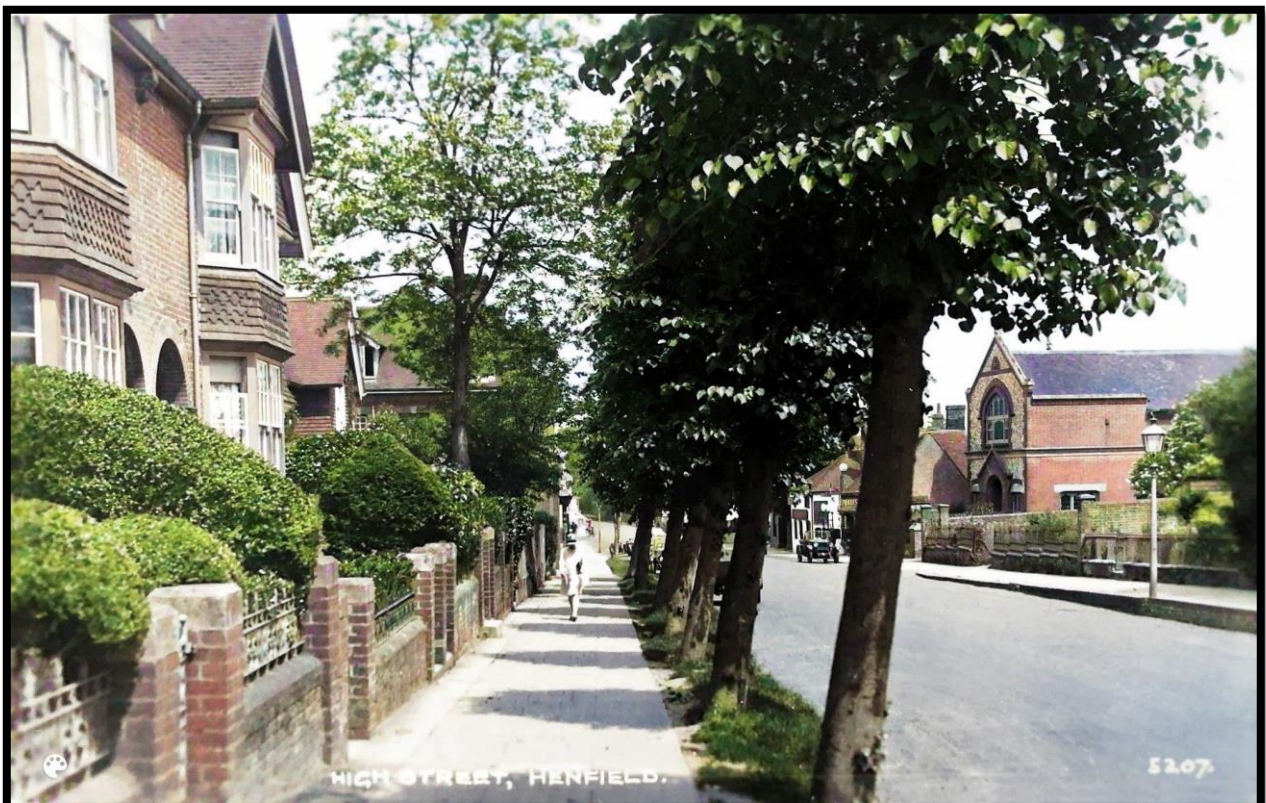
Project: Arborea

Trees of Henfield Past



Lucie's Survivors – these were the last two survivors of a High Street that was once lined with trees at multiple points along its length. Although most were gradually lost over the course of the 20th century, these remained in front of Henfield Museum founder Lucie Bishop's house, likely thanks to her strong advocacy and position on both the Parish and District councils. After her death in 1984, they were swiftly removed, the reason being given as the roots causing an uneven pavement.

Below, we see more surviving fellows on a 1920s postcard, colourised and restored.





And the row of poplars at the top of the High Street on the other side, seen slightly earlier, in 1906.

Continuing our historic photo tour...

A wide selection of large size prints of 19th and early 20th century photographs of Henfield and its surrounding areas are currently on sale in the museum. From the Curator's private collection, they are priced at just £3 each, with many being backed with cardboard ready for framing.



A recently restored image showing locomotive 'Polegate' about to set off towards Steyning, around 1920 or a little earlier. The two crewmen are posing along with the station porter on the tracks and the customary milk churn sits beside the station sign. This engine - No. 392 - was built nearby at the Brighton works in 1894 for the London, Brighton and South Coast Railway (LB&SCR), being designed by the Superintendent there, Robert Billinton (who was to die in office after a life of designing engines). It was withdrawn after a reasonable, but not overlong, length of service in the first round of withdrawals of this class in 1933. Some of its sister engines served into the 1950s. Formed in 1846 via the merger of five young railway companies, the LB&SCR was itself merged with several others to form the Southern Railway in 1923. Henfield Station closed along with the rest of the branch line in March 1966.



The Common has been known as both Broadmere and Broadmare, although we'll leave you to judge which would have been closest to the traditional Sussex dialect. The first edition 1809 Ordnance Survey map even labels it 'Brood Mare', the cartographers possibly mishearing or misunderstanding a local accent! Recently restored and then colourised, this is a particularly successful example of the algorithmic colouriser used for museum colourisations (DeOldify). In some cases, more manual colouring work is still required after the completion of the automatic process.



An Edwardian view of Sandy Lane, c. 1906. On the left, we see the bank of the Nep Town sandpit, the then recently built 'Five Oaks' house and one of the namesake oaks. The neat rows of market garden of the field then known as 'Hills and Moors' lies on the right. By this point the field had been such a garden for many decades - the 1845 tithe listing also shows it as such, belonging to the local landowner Lucretia Wood of Chestham Place.

One of her tenants, Richard Cheriman, lived in a since demolished cottage and garden in the top corner of the field. Sadly, records show him spending the end of his life in an insane asylum. Maps show this cottage to have been of a similar shape and size to the surviving Wistaria Cottage across the road. No images of it are known to survive, excepting one distant sketch which provides no real detail. By the 1890s, sheds relating to the sandpit works (mainly on the other side of the lane) had replaced it, being behind and to the photographer's right.

The five oaks surrounded the field, with most still surviving around the field today. Storms claimed one at the bottom of the field in November 2022, due to flooding undermining the roots. In 2019 and 2021, the local community successfully fought their case at both a planning Inquiry and Hearing regarding a speculative housing development on this field. The historic setting of the area was a key reason for the Planning Inspector's decisions to refuse permission for development, with the location on the edge of village conservation area now offering one of the only public outlooks to the South Downs from this side of the Henfield ridgeline. Many people pass by on the way to and from the Downs Link route and of late, the popular 'Cabin at Berretts Farm' café.