

## Memories of a retired Mudlark

The story of the Mudlark goes back centuries. There are many records of these folk who spent their entire lives scouring the foreshore of the Thames for old rope, coal, scrap metal or anything that dropped from lighters or ships during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. This was their only means of survival.



View from Queenhithe Dock looking east under Southwark Bridge to the Tower

So it was that in the early nineteen fifties, as a school boy listening to Children's Hour on BBC radio home service, I heard a fellow describing his wanderings along the Thames foreshore at low water between Blackfriars and Southwark Bridge. He spoke of clay pipe bowls and stems, potsherds, along with handmade medieval pins from the homes on old London Bridge and coins, all part of the river's history. Around 1970, something dislodged this memory from a forgotten corner of my mind, with the result that a short time after having secured the advice and permission of the Port of London Authority and a set of tide tables, found me descending a twenty four foot iron ladder early one Sunday morning down onto the foreshore at Bull Wharf east of Queenhithe Dock. This was to start an interest that lasted some sixteen years on the river and into later life.

My first foray yielded an ivory handled knife bearing the cutler's mark of the London Dagger over a crown and heart (Ephraim How – 1686). This along with some other bits and pieces cemented my passion for "*old things.*" Over the following months and years, I got to know many folk like myself who had this disease. As time passes and the number of finds increase, it becomes evident

cont'd p3

## From The Chairman

Wynn Saunders

Since our last Newsletter, we have visited Cuckfield museum in April including a guided walk around Cuckfield village. Mr Mark Perry-Nash gave a talk on "Life in a Medieval Village" in May. Some friends were on duty for the special openings during Garden & Arts weekend and on Italian market day. I thought we benefited from the publicity. My thanks to the volunteers who gave their time.

The initial batch of Henfield Railway DVD narrated by Eddie Colgate were sold out. Further copies have been made and are selling well. The curator has been looking at possibilities of producing post cards, for sale in the museum, of historic views of Henfield. The programme of Oral History is progressing, to add to the collection of stories narrated by the residents of Henfield of their interesting lives.

The Henfield Community Partnership had a leaflet printed promoting Henfield and the museum. This is available in the museum and in other locations in Sussex. As Henfield expands with new residents arriving in the village we need to raise the profile of the museum to bring in more visitors through its doors. I would welcome any suggestions from the readers how this can be achieved.

Finally, I will not be seeking re-election as the Chairman at the next AGM. I am so pleased with the response from Henfield residents to join the Friends of Henfield Museum and long it may continue.

## The Curator's Report

Alan Barwick

The museum opened once again for the Gardens & Arts Weekend on the 11<sup>th</sup> & 12<sup>th</sup> June. We had 106 visitors on the Saturday and 102 on the Sunday. Carolyn Phillips and I took people on historical walks around the village on those days leaving the museum at 4pm and 5.30pm. This attracted about 30 people in total, and raised around £60 for The Haven. The museum also opened for the Italian Market day on the 26<sup>th</sup> June, and we had 24 visitors on that occasion. We also opened especially on the 16<sup>th</sup> August for a coach party of 18 who had come from a hotel at Storrington.

Stephanie Richards has been showing off our collection of costumes to interested parties, and has been giving the museum a plug in articles she has written, and on her blog.

The museum has received official confirmation that we have been granted full accreditation. A number of recommendations for areas of improvement concerning the documentation side of things were given, and these are being actioned.

Various items have been donated over the last few months including a model tip cart, costumes made from parachute silk, postcards of Henfield, books on Sussex, and items relating to the Holder family.

A temporary exhibition of dinosaur bones from a private collection will run from the end of September until the New Year. If you know of someone who has a collection which they would like to display in the museum please put them in contact with me.

## Memories of a retired Mudlark (cont'd from p1)

that you may have more of one type artefact than any other. This is where the word “*collection*” makes itself apparent. Hence my large collection of knives and keys. I soon found that if I had say, a decorated button or a coin of interest, I could swap it with perhaps a knife or key found by another person. This is how many collections were made.



The picture of this knife from circa 1450 shows the condition of the piece – near perfect, due to oxygen free dry mud in which it was encased. Seeing such a piece arouses the question “*who last touched it?* We will never know, but we know whoever owned it probably saw the Tudor King Henry. As to its age and place of discovery, well we know that.



The picture of the revolver arouses another set of questions, *who, why and when?* We know it is a Webley British Bulldog from about the 1880s and it was found under Chelsea Bridge. But what is interesting is who threw it into the river, when and why. Did this gun have a sinister history? Of course we shall never know. The how, when and why questions as well as the identities apply to all the finds, which is what this is all about.

The Thames is a dangerous place, no doubt – that’s if you disregard certain factors. The tide at London Bridge rises some 24 feet in just few hours. It cares for nobody and races in and out leaving seemingly flat shiny mud in some places. Just fit for the unwary who would walk across it only to find themselves sinking slowly. However where we were, the foreshore was solid and safe, but you still had to be acutely aware of the water level. Forget it at your peril.

Today there is a large band of boy and girl Mudlarks of all ages collecting on the foreshore. These folk are down on the beach in all weathers, stooped over and examining closely every square inch of river bed. Their finds are regularly posted up on Facebook (London Mudlark) and they are in constant contact with the London Museum. Good for them, for they are securing part of London’s history. As for me – well I am an armchair Mudlark now, but I am in constant touch with these dedicated people, offering encouragement and advice.

There are a few of my pieces in the Henfield Museum, Pilgrim Badge, Medieval Padlock, Spinning Top, Clay pipes etc. if you are interested.

Graham duHeaume

## What's Coming Up

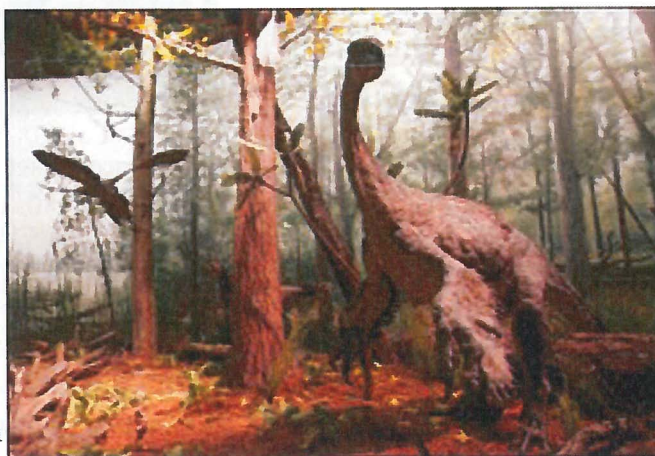
### Future events for the Friends of Henfield Museum

- Visit to Steyning Museum (and, weather dependent, historical walk around Steyning) on Wed 12th October, at 3.30pm - £4 per head. Please put names on list in museum or call Wynn for details (01273 495910). Meet at Henfield Hall at 3pm
- We have been invited to attend the Friends of East Grinstead Museum speaker's night - *Discovering Brambletye Medieval Manor and Park* on Fri 4th November at 8pm, at East Court Mansion, East Grinstead - £3.00 per head. Please see flyer in museum or call Wynn for details (01273 495910).
- The Friends' Christmas Party will be held in the Garden Room, Henfield Hall on Wednesday 14th December 2016 from **5.00 pm for 5.30 pm**. Please note change of time. Speaker tbc

### Exhibitions at the Museum - Dinosaurs

From end of September to December 2016, Henfield Museum will be invaded by dinosaurs from around the world, provided by Brian Smith, a Henfield resident, who has been a 'dinosaur hunter' since the age of 10. he has found many dinosaur bones and teeth that include the pre-dinosaur Rhychosaurus skull, a very early ancestor of dinosaurs. More recently he found dinosaur remains from Ardingly which includes a pterosaur tooth, dinosaur bones and a dinosaur tooth that is currently regarding as a new species. Imperial College are soon to publish a research paper on results from this find which we hope will be available in the Henfield Museum this year.

The Henfield Museum will be home to a suite of dinosaur bones and teeth, including a whole skeleton of one species. Maps and text will tell you the Dinosaur Story and there will be a few other fossils and minerals to make up a fascinating geological display. Around the display will be QR codes you can scan that will take you to news clips, photos and further information. We hope that most of the Henfield residents and children will get the chance to see this display and maybe try some fossil hunting locally here in Henfield and even take up the hobby to be a 'dinosaur hunter' themselves.



Of general Sussex interest the mid 19<sup>th</sup> Century Gideon Mantell found in Cuckfield, West Sussex some of the first remains of a creature he named Iguanodon. Later the term dinosauria was coined for other species found in the Wealden and other Early Cretaceous rocks.

The British Dinosaur Trust is being established to gain World Heritage Status for being the home of Dinosaurs ([www.britishdinosaurtrust.com](http://www.britishdinosaurtrust.com)).

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For more information or enquiries regarding The Friends of Henfield Museum activities please contact: Rose Sharp, The Secretary, The Friends of Henfield Museum, email: [rosesharp2003@yahoo.co.uk](mailto:rosesharp2003@yahoo.co.uk)