

The Friends of The Twickenham Museum

25 The Embankment
Twickenham TW1 3DU
Newsletter, December 2003

Charity no 1028984

On Saturday December 13th at noon
Dr Vincent Cable MP
will open a new exhibition
prepared by John Sheaf:

'People at Work in Twickenham, Whitton, Teddington and the Hamptons'



*P C William Heavens,
a Hampton policeman in the early 20th century*

The Museum at Two Years

This time last year we were celebrating the museum's safe birth and promising early development. Gaining in experience and, we trust, wisdom, we have found our second year to be a period of intensive learning about what the smooth and productive running of such an institution entails. We continue to rejoice in strong public support and in the dedication and enthusiasm of our volunteers, without whom there would be no museum, but we take nothing for granted and are pleased hear your views and receive helpful comments and suggestions.

The Volunteers

Two volunteers continue to cover each two hour period during the ten hours we are open weekly. About forty five currently take part in the rota, ably managed recently by Paul Kershaw. We warmly welcome anyone who feels able to help the museum in any capacity. Our co-ordinator of voluntary activity, Geoffrey Morgan, invites those who would like to 'have a go' to telephone him on 8894 3858. Visitor numbers remain buoyant and should reach 8000 by the end of the year. They have varied from less than a dozen in

a day to a remarkable 185 on Open House Sunday, September 21st.

The Exhibitions

'Villages on the River' has been enormously popular for the past year and a half, while display cases show a miscellany of local artefacts and a selection of older items borrowed from The Museum of London. "We both thought that the museum looked bright, clean, modern, and thoroughly professional", wrote Simon Lace, until recently Curator of Richmond Museum, and his wife Sally who designed the story-



boards. "What you have done reflects great credit on all your Trustees and volunteers who have obviously worked very hard to attain professional standards of presentation." Praise indeed.

Against this background we have had two shorter displays, the first of which, '**A Tribute to Donald Simpson**', was opened by the then mayor, Councillor Douglas Orchard on May 3rd.

It comprised Donald's collection of antiquarian prints and engravings, now generously given to the museum by his daughters who have also contributed handsomely to our Endowment Fund. The catalogue included a moving and informative 'Appreciation' by Dick Cashmore, characteristically anonymous. The second was 'The Lost Garden of Whitton Dean', the creation, and the exceptional debut, of our new Trustee Ed Harris. This reminded us that Whitton is a far from negligible part of the old Borough and opened the eyes of many to a fascinating epoch in its history. Now Teddington and the Hamptons await their moment in the spotlight. Has anyone any ideas?

John Sheaf remains our Trustee principally concerned with the planning and execution of exhibitions. His latest achievement will be open to the public from December 13th (see above).

Outside Exhibitions

With the aid of an elegant and ingenious display system, spotted and acquired for the museum by Kathy and Colin White, the museum was able to respond to two invitations this year. The first was to **Heritage Lottery Day** at Loseley Park in Surrey on 30 April, sponsored by Local Heritage initiative (who with the Countryside Commission and the Nationwide Building Society have given major support to the museum). The second was to Marble Hill Park in June to celebrate the centenary of the acquisition of the estate for public enjoyment. The tent we shared with beekeepers and the Mary Wallace Theatre competed on unfavourable terms with a large and noisy funfair, but the weather, as always, was superb.



at Loseley Park on 30 April

The House

Two very different events deserve recording. It is not widely known that at some time before the acquisition of No. 25 a small but respectable coal mine had established itself in a cupboard to the left of the ground floor fireplace and showed no signs of leaving. It gave no trouble, made no noise and disturbed no-one's enjoyment of the museum. When its time had come, an oddly-caparisoned couple led by Joy Lee and including the Chairman entered the dark hole as best they could, removing in three hours of (actually rather enjoyable) work six sacks of dust and ten of coal.

More prosaic, but more satisfying in the long run, was the decision that if we agreed not to use the specially designed top floor flat as a dwelling we would not be subject to the expense of an annual Council Tax. The desirability of a resident curator has become less apparent, and it is clear that we need this space for storage anyway. To use the flat as a residence we have only to inform the Council and start paying tax.



view of the river Thames from the top floor

Special Sources of Income

Sir Michael Timms, an accomplished local amateur artist and fisherman, was persuaded by his friends Colin and Kathy White to paint a map of our stretch of the riverside depicting its manmade and natural delights. The reverse provides a wealth of historical material compiled by Tony Beckles Willson. A bargain at 50p, it is selling well and is also available as a poster in a tube. Tony's guided tours of Pope's grotto and his handbook on the subject continue to bring us in a steady income.

The museum table bears an excellent selection of publications by local authors on the history of the Borough, and we sell these at a small profit to the museum. For the fourth year running we had a stall at the HANDS May Fair, when a collection of books given by Heather Morgan generated half the takings. The box for spontaneous contributions at the museum rarely disappoints. These various sources are important to our financial health.

The Butt Collection

As many will know, the widow of the late Professor John Butt has given the museum his working library of early editions of our distinguished former resident, Alexander Pope. Most of these were in sore need of restoration. Who should do this and how much would it cost? For the answers we are indebted to our Trustee Jean Cranswick, who found at Marlborough Rare Books an expert who was not only able to value the books (as in their restored state) for insurance purposes but recommend a bookbinder held in high regard where books of this period are concerned, Nicholas Abrams of Wellington in Somerset. He has now done about half the work, beautifully, as anyone can see through the glass doors of our fine red custom-made bookcase (in which a lady visitor from Japan said she would wish to live if she were a book). We have managed to afford the work so far, and are applying to the Pilgrim Trust for help with the rest. Ellie Weld, a professional librarian, has generously offered to prepare the catalogue when restoration is complete. The books will be accessible to bona fide scholars on site, but any serious booklover may make an appointment to see them.

Administration

There are eight Trustees since we welcomed Paddy Ching of Teddington and Ed Harris of Whitton this year. We meet every three months, and are relieved of day to day decisions by an Administrative Group which meets monthly. This system is working well. Our Treasurer Colin White attends both committees. We are of course greatly assisted by those skilled in their respective fields who are not a formal part of the organisation: Maurice Parry-Wingfield who audits our accounts, Kathy White who is a fertile source of ideas, a negotiator (and

an expert in the challenging art of filling out complex forms), the team Tony Beckles Willson has drawn together in service of the website, and Suzannah Herbert and Ralph Cox, respectively our invaluable House and Facilities Managers. We thank them all, and not least our indefatigable secretary Mair Graham.

The Museum Website:

www.twickenham-museum.org.uk

As foreseen in last year's Newsletter the website went "live" in February. At that time it contained a representative collection of pieces and information about the history of the old Middlesex Borough and has been steadily expanded through the year. There are now over 250 entries describing People, Places, Events and Artefacts starting with the charter of AD704. The "timeline" covers many local events over the period in relation to national events.

We have recorded over 18,000 visitors to the site: about 2,000 a month. Our viewers communicate: there is a steady stream each week of requests for help (we cannot undertake family history research), comment (usually favourable and constructive) and occasionally, criticism, which serves to keep the authors on their toes. It is satisfying to hear from the descendants of past residents, in one case from New Zealand; others in USA, Canada and Australia.

Work continues. We have started a Schools timeline, describing the history of education in the borough. The earliest record here is of the founding of Hampton School in 1557.

Soon there will be pieces about the Gunpowder Mills, a principal industry for 400 years; the Hampton Cannon; Dr William Battie, President of the Royal College of Physicians and proprietor of lunatic asylums in the 18th century; Mathias Perkins, barber-surgeon and Lord of the manor of Teddington; an early theatre ("playhouse") in Twickenham, and Edward Chapman, a bricklayer and the second of four generations bearing the same Christian name.

The working team has recently been strengthened by the welcome arrival of Robert Youngs, bringing invaluable digital photographic and computer skills with him.



As a voluntary organisation we are entirely self-supporting. Help in kind enables the running and the management of the museum on a day-to-day basis. As well as this the financial generosity of our many supporters and sponsors has enabled the museum to flourish. However, fundraising has to continue in order to assure our long term security and financial independence. As reported in 2001 we have established an endowment fund. We are nearly two-thirds of the way towards meeting a target of £150,000 achieving this aim would put the Trust in a strong financial position for the foreseeable future, giving us an assured core income from prudent investment.

We invite those who have not had the opportunity to contribute lately to make a donation. Filling out the accompanying form also enables you to remain on the mailing list for the future if you so wish.

Opening times

We are open on Tuesdays and Saturdays from 11.00am – 3.00pm and Sundays from 2.00pm – 4.00pm. Special visits can be arranged for organised groups on other days and times.