

FRIENDS OF GOSPORT MUSEUM

www.friendsofgosportmuseum.org.uk

NEWSLETTER

NOVEMBER/ DECEMBER 2011

Christmas Party

12th December 2pm

Studio Gosport Discovery Centre

Talk-Lancelyn Green Collection

26th January 2012 7:30pm

Studio Gosport Discovery Centre

Sherlock Holmes

By Michael Gunton

Please book at Discovery Centre

Friends of Gosport Museum

Informal Coffee Meeting

in the Discovery Centre 10:30am
every 2nd Thursday of the month.

Meetings before next Newsletter

Thursday 10th November

Not December

Thursday 12th January 2012

Thursday 9th February 2012

For around 1 hour

meet at Readers' Rest Café

Chairman's Letter

Its that time of year again. There is a nip in the air, the evenings are getting longer,we are switching the lights on earlier and earlier, summer holidays are a distant memory and Christmas is just around the corner.

Let us go back to summer; I greatly enjoyed the "Exhibition of Town Hall Treasures" and also the Exhibition of Art by the A-Level Students of St.Vincent which followed and I hope you all shared in this degree of nostalgia; as for the St.Vincent Exhibition, I do trust that the A-Level results were a reflection of all the hard work and originality of the students; the exhibits were of a very high standard and several were "thought provoking". It is good to think that there are many budding original artists in Gosport.

May I now thank everyone who contributed to the Community Funding Scheme at Waitrose in July, we received the magnificent sum of £215 which we shall give towards the cost of "Inter-active Mammoth" for the Geology Museum. I understand that work is in progress in producing It.

The recent talks, "Alverstoke's Charter of Liberty" by Joan Russell and Maggie Ventham an the talk on "Grange Farm" by Bob Whiteley, were both well received; unfortunately, much to my regret, I was unable to hear either of them.

A note for your diaries, Monday 12th December. This is when "The Friends" will meet for our Christmas Party. Come along in force, bring your friends and relatives, let us make the Party this year a memorable one.

My best wishes, have a Happy and Joyous Christmas. Sydney Aynsworth, Chairman

BAFM Conference

I attended the annual conference in Woodstock of the S.E. (Western) area of the British Association of the Friends of Museums as the representative of our museum held on Tuesday September 6th. The conference was held in the Oxfordshire County Museum, a fine building once a private house and now much extended in the very centre of Woodstock, very near to the entrance to Blenheim Palace. Representatives came from all parts of the area.

We met in the Museum's modern Education Centre, tucked away at the back of the building, a facility I much envied, one of many times I was aware of stabs of jealousy when I heard of other museum's budgets, facilities and opportunities. On the other hand, some had problems of tricky relationships within their groups and/or with administrative layers above which problems are now certainly not ours . .

We began with a talk by Trevor Hendy, the Chairman of the Woodstock Friends. Apparently the building had once been the H.Q. of the Oxfordshire Fire Services, the County Museum Service taking over the building in 1965. In 1980, the dire condition of the property, particularly the state of the electrics made the C.C. decide to sell the property. This caused an uproar in the town and county. As a result, the Museum on that site was saved, but the scale of the fundraising staggered me. £50,000 was raised in donations, 2 lottery bids have been successfully won and a fine Museum has been saved. It is well worth a visit, everything is interestingly and imaginatively displayed. Obviously its remit is the history of the County.

After an excellent buffet lunch, we reassembled to listen to David Baynes of the Portsmouth Naval Museum talk on the role of volunteers there, for which he is responsible in that fine, national status museum. Again the situation there is on a scale that bears no relation to ours. David is himself a volunteer and organises, always in co-operation with the paid staff of course, a large body of volunteers to assist in the many facets of that major large museum. The fact that a volunteer is allowed to undertake this role is impressive and reflects well on both sides involved, common sense, tact and pragmatism much in evidence. Such a museum of course can draw on the large pool of former Naval personnel, men and women in the area for its volunteers.

Then we had a talk at the other end of the scale, about the struggle to start a small museum from scratch – the Witney Town Museum, blankets being an important theme of course. The museum was fortunate in being able to acquire a suitable building conveniently vacated by a major building firm going into liquidation. Some of the volunteers there were old employees who seemed to like still working where they always had. !! The problems there were of an administrative type with personality clashes, something it was felt was a perennial danger – people being people.

We ended with a group discussion, sharing our ideas on what worked and what didn't. I didn't really find any of this helpful to our position. I learned that something that happens and works in one place doesn't in another, the levels of income and scope vary so, clearly we are at the bottom of the league in numbers and resources which dictates our clout and opportunities. I can't say that I come away feeling too positive. I liken our situation to that of the painter Turner who, to paint a storm had himself tied to the mast in the face of the storm, as ABOVE all, hang the 'black cloud' of CUTS. Just let us support Janet Wildman the very best we can. Mary Duly

Jessieiton White (Mario) - the early years. by Mary Duly

So are we able to discern signs in the child of the independent, forceful character we met in her adult life, in the girl born in Gosport in 1832? I think we can.

Her father, Thomas ran a prosperous shipbuilding business on Forton Lake at the end of what is now Ferrol Rd. It seems to have been a comfortable middle class family, with Thomas in many

ways the typical paterfamilias, of the time. He held rigid fundamental religious views and the household was run as he wished with a great deal of religious observances both daily and on Sundays, and always an urgent concern with the saving of souls. Jessie found this irksome.

Thomas had 3 wives in quick succession, Jane was a child of the 2nd marriage in 1827 to a Jane Teague Meriton, a lady with most interesting American connection including a New Orleans uncle who had held incredibly liberal, racial views for his time and place as he even freed his slaves as a matter of principle as early as 1820. This 2nd Mrs White was herself a most enlightened person, less interested in saving souls, more interested in promoting education for the poor through the burgeoning Sunday School movement and for those who could afford to pay she even pioneered the setting up of an early Pestalozzi school in Gosport High Street, in the building occupied by Fairhall and Durston, the estate agents. Sadly she died in 1834 when Jessie was only 2. Even so, I am inclined to think that some of the characteristics that Jessie later showed could have been inherited from her mother, been in the genetic mix...

Thomas did not remain a widower for long, he married another Jane remarkably quickly; the family knew her as she had been the teacher in the Pestalozzi school, that the earlier Jane had set up. This Jane brought Jessie up, along with the 4 children of the 1st marriage and Jessie's brother Fred. Jessie seems to have had more freedom than we think children, especially girls, of that period had. She loved to play on the lake - when the tide was up, 'no mud and nastiness to eye and nose' (her words), her companion, until he went away to sea, usually being, a child of the 1st marriage and a kindred spirit. Her first experience of formal education, at home, was not very positive as Jessie detested her governess, and obviously showed it as her reaction to this regime and in other ways, demonstrated an independent spirit. There was once a domestic stand-off. She would not apologise for lying when accused of this by her stepmother as she believed strongly that she had not so offended. "I am not wrong, I won't beg pardon." Banished to a bedroom on a diet of bread and water, still she held out, until the grown-ups capitulated, accepting a diplomatic compromise of words.

She was also quite prepared to argue with her father over inconsistencies as she saw it in the biblical stories, which he accepted literally. Her father, from his standpoint, certainly had cause to worry over Jessie's soul. She was sent to a school in the High Street, Old Portsmouth. When Jessie was only 10, she found an unexpectedly sympathetic mentor in a new minister, the Rev. Morell at the Congregational church the family attended in the High St. As a result of his influence, she began to use her undoubted intelligence and apply herself to her studies. Through him she began to show practical concern for the poor around her, which led to another contretemps with her father, who perhaps rightly thought that 'taking' food from the family larder was not the right way to go about dealing with the problem of helping the poor she saw around her. Jessie certainly thought it more practical than her father's way of handing out religious tracts. (Jessie's rationale was the same as that of William Booth, who some years later founded the Salvation Army.) Her father did however show some psychological insight in dealing with the situation in that he agreed to give Jessie and her brother Fred, who was also involved, money for them to spend in return for their denying themselves sugar and butter from their diet. A cautionary learning and training situation for Jessie!!

The family then moved to Portsmouth and Jessie was sent to school in Reading, where she worked hard, she was obviously a capable scholar, though she frequently had problems due to perceived lack of discipline, and untidiness. (I find myself very fond of Jessie!) She did though appreciate the quality of the teaching. I can't help laughing though at the way she dealt with the problem of losing her possessions. She came to an agreement with a less able student who was prepared to look after her possessions which tended to roam in return for help with her exercises!! Very practical and slightly naughty! She continued her education in London for a time, then in Birmingham where where she benefited from meeting with people who were friends of her earlier mentor, the Rev. Morell. Then only 18, (she really did have, for the time, in spite of everything, an amazingly amenable father) she went to Paris to attend lectures at the Sorbonne.....

AND that is where I started my last article....

Thinking about Jessie and how she 'shaped up', I think her maternal inheritance was of importance. I think too it mattered that with her father and stepmother, particularly her father, situations were created that trained her to test herself against accepted view points and stick to the end to what she thought was right,-which she did at a time when it was not the normal accepted behaviour for a young woman. And I think there was clearly more to Thomas White than a religious zealot, I think by the time Jessie was a young woman he realized that here was a person with something of the quality of a Joan of Arc, a minor force of nature.

Perhaps my interpretation is rash, I know I have not taken a degree in Psychology!! But I like it when people, for a good reason, do not conform to the expected norms of behaviour for the times in which they live. Jessie Meriton White MARIO certainly was her own girl/woman. And thank goodness for that.. Mary Duly

Friends of Gosport
Museum

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Membership Renewal 2011/12

Normally this Newsletter would not be sent out to those who have not renewed (still £5 or £7.50 joint per year) but I hope you will excuse me for sending you this one, if you no longer wish to be a member. I will not send another. If you do wish to renew, please contact Lind Hedley, 7 Fairhome Close, Elson, Gosport, PO12 4HZ. At this time the more members there are the more effect that could be made at a very difficult time for the Museum Service. I hope that some of the items in this Newsletter, will show that it is worthwhile being a member of The Friends of Gosport Museum, plenty of things to do and even being a member can help. So if you or someone you know would like to join, (new membership from now will not need renewing until 1st April 2013). Membership forms available from the Discovery Centre and Committee.

If you have any information or photos that you think may be of interest to members of the Friends of Gosport Museum or others, please let me have them by post or email, details below, by 16th December for the January/ February 2012 Newsletter, include details for events in early March 2012. Thank you. Ian

Friends of Gosport Museum web site at
www.friendsofgosportmuseum.org.uk

Please send contributions for the Newsletter to
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by email please let me know.
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