

FRIENDS OF GOSPORT MUSEUM NEWSLETTER

April 2006

ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

followed by a talk by

Ruth Warren

Wednesday 24th May
at 7.15 p.m.
in the Discovery Centre

Admission Free

All Welcome

SUMMER SOCIAL

Sunday 2nd July 12.30 - 3.30

at *Peppers Wine Bar*

Overlooking the Boating Lake and
Walpole Park

This year our Summer Social will be at this delightful restaurant in the centre of Gosport which has great views all round - and we will have exclusive use.

Buy your tickets at the A.G.M. or from
Linda Hedley at the Discovery Centre

Membership Renewal Reminder

Renewal of membership forms - £7-50 for families or £5-00 for individuals - were enclosed with the February Newsletter. Payment was due on 1st April; if you have yet to pay please send your cheque to our Treasurer David Moore at 17 Northcroft Road, Gosport PO12 3DR as soon as possible.

March Lecture by Kay Ainsworth

It was amazing how much ground Kay Ainsworth was able to cover so effortlessly in her fascinating illustrated talk about the Saxons. We learnt about their history and culture, their buildings and architecture, beautiful jewellery and superb illuminated manuscripts and much, much more. She has promised to give us another talk in the future. I don't know the date nor the subject - but I'm booking in for it now!

Bob Whiteley

September Coach trip to Chawton & Alton

Enclosed with this Newsletter is a booking form for the Coach trip on Thursday 7th September. Please book early as coaches have to be reserved - and a deposit paid - well in advance. Further information about Chawton on the following page.

CHAWTON HOUSE

One hears the word Chawton and immediately thinks of Jane Austen who, with her mother and sister Cassandra, lived in a cottage in the village provided for them by their wealthy brother Edward Austen (Knight). It was he who owned the big house, Chawton House, as the heir to the childless Knight family (related to the Austen family by marriage) by whom he had been adopted, though he lived mostly at his other property, Godmersham, in Kent.

The Knight family continued to own Chawton House down through the years, but by the 1980s it had become a problem. The years had taken their toll and money was short. Various schemes for its future were explored but came to nothing.

Then an amazing thing happened. Sandy Kerner, a wealthy American came on the scene. She had the money, she was a Jane Austen addict, she had an outstanding collection of a neglected field of study - that of early English women's writing (1600 - 1830) for which she wanted a home and she had the vision to see its future in Chawton House. It was the ideal place to base the collection as the nucleus of a serious study in that field. So it has come to pass. Sandy bought the house and immediate surroundings and has a 125 year lease on the remainder of the estate, after some had been sold off.

The house has benefited from a sensitive and imaginative restoration, and the Library is up and running with a serious academic provenance through its links with Southampton University. Work continues on the gardens.

Sandy has the financial backing of the Leonard X. Bosack & Bette M. Kruger Foundation.

All lovers of Jane Austen are indebted to them.

Mary Duly

Some further information about Chawton

According to the Domesday Book Chawton Manor and farm were occupied by a Saxon named Odo before William the Conqueror made him surrender it to his Norman follower Hugh de Port. The de Ports continued to live there for about 500 years - for the first 300 years by direct male descendants and then in the female line.

The Knight family enter the picture in 1524 when William Knight leased the Manor and farm. After his death John Knight bought the Manor and his grandson, also called John, was the principal builder of Chawton House as it stands today.

In the C18th Elizabeth Knight - the last descendant of the original Knight family - carried out considerable development and restoration work on the house and garden. After she died the property passed to her cousin Thomas Knight who also owned Godmersham in Kent. His son Thomas Knight II inherited the estate in 1789. Because he and his wife were childless they decided to adopt a nephew Edward, son of the Rev'd George Austen and brother of Jane Austen.

The Discovery Centre and Gosport Museum - a personal view

Now that we have had a year to get accustomed to the amalgamation of the Central Library and Gosport Museum perhaps the time is right to assess the situation with regard to the Museum.

Moving the refurbished "Story of Gosport Gallery" to the former Central Library building was a mistake and means that The Gosport Museum no longer has any focus - its dismembered parts being distributed around the Discovery Centre. Calling it "The Museum on the Mezzanine" - a ludicrous name - seems to deny the fact that it is a central part of The Gosport Museum. And although it may cover a similar floor area to the old Museum Gallery, the planners failed to realise that because of the windows and wall mounted heating it is impossible to have any sort of displays against the external walls.

Labelling the old Museum building the "Local Studies Centre" also seems to deny the existence of The Gosport Museum. This building now houses the Local Studies Section and the superb Geology Gallery covering the geology of most of Hampshire; to call the latter "Local Studies" is quite absurd. The building also contains the Museum's archives, reserve collections, work rooms and offices. It should continue to be called "The Gosport Museum".

Prior to the development of the Discovery Centre the Gosport Museum not only had its own much admired building but also a Curator, Assistant Curator and three full time Museum Assistant. The Museum Assistants have been absorbed into the Discovery Centre staff and retrained as library assistants. It still has a Curator but following the tragic early death of David Kemp last summer the Curator - who is also Curator of Havant Museum - has had no direct staffing support and it is obviously impossible for her to develop and run a Museum single handed on three days a week.

Since it is unlikely that those who planned the Discovery Centre are going to admit that they have got it all wrong, what can be done ?

Firstly, have a large notice board at the entrance of the Discovery Centre with a plan showing where the various elements of the Museum can be found.

Secondly, signposts with letters that can read from a distance of at least twenty feet directing people to these displays. Who, entering the Discovery Centre today, can guess that above their heads is a major Museum display ?

Thirdly, rename the Museum on the Mezzanine. Perhaps "Gosport Museum's Gallery - The Story of Gosport" ?

Fourthly, replace the awful gimmick to the left of the main entrance which is variously reported to have cost £35,000 or £50,000 with a Museum exhibition case.

Fifthly, restore the name The Gosport Museum to the old Museum building with a large notice board explaining where all the various elements of the Museum are located.

Finally and most importantly of all, sort out the staffing problems. Here we do have some really good news as you will read on the next page.

Bob Whiteley

APPOINTMENT OF NEW SENIOR MEMBER OF STAFF

At the Joint Management Committee Meeting on 28th March it was agreed that our present Curator who is also Curator of Havant Museum should become "***Keeper of Gosport Collections***" with responsibility for the care and development of the present and future collections in Gosport, on display and in store.

A new post is to be created called "***Community Curator (Museum Development) Gosport***" whose job it will be ***to deliver day to day management of museum related functions and activities within the Gosport Discovery Centre complex as a fully integrated member of the Discovery Centre management team and to extend pastoral care to other museums in Gosport as required.***

He or she will be responsible with other colleagues to develop museum related training for staff in the Discovery Centre, for facilitating access to stored collections as well as being responsible for day to day management of collections on display.

Friends of Gosport Museum Committee

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Bob Whiteley

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Rosemarie Gibaud, The

Living History Village

Museum Curator

Chairman Gosport Society

He or she will also be responsible with others such as colleagues at SEARCH for outreach programmes to the wider community including schools and colleges and the delivery of public lectures and talks to local groups and societies.

It is hoped an appointment will be made by the end of May.

Friends United

Enclosed with this Newsletter is a copy of the newly started Friends of Hampshire Museums and Archives Service Newsletter which has many interesting articles.

Do read Caroline Dudley's note on page 2. She is especially keen to encourage the role of Friends and Volunteers and listened most carefully to the points raised by your representatives at the Joint Management Committee Meeting she attended in March.

**Please send contributions for the Newsletter to Bob Whiteley, FGM Newsletter Editor
5 Grange Farm, Little Woodham Lane,
Gosport PO13 8 AB**

The views expressed are not necessarily those of The Hampshire CC Museums Service or its staff

**Membership of the Friends of Gosport Museum is open to all - Ask at the Discovery Centre for an Application form or contact Linda Hedley at 7 Fairhome Close, Elson, Gosport PO12 4HZ
This Newsletter was printed and produced with the help of the Museum**