

# FRIENDS OF GOSPORT MUSEUM

## NEWSLETTER

November 2005

### Remembering David Kemp

*The Friends of Gosport Museum's Committee discussed providing a lasting memorial for David Kemp who died in August and suggested that the Geology Gallery should be re-named:*

### "The David Kemp Gallery"

*The Museum's Joint Management Committee (Three Hampshire County Councillors and three Gosport Borough Councillors) agreed unanimously to support this suggestion and are arranging an appropriate official re-naming ceremony which will probably take place in the New Year.*

### Friends Christmas Party

As last year the Christmas Party will be held in the **Search Building in Clarence Road from 3 p.m. to 5 p.m. on Wednesday 14<sup>th</sup> December.**

Come and enjoy good food, good company and a chance to win a prize in the raffle, as well as exploring the superb displays.

Once again we would like to remember those who will not be enjoying their Christmas at home but will be in Gosport War Memorial Hospital. Please bring a small present wrapped and labelled "**from the Friends of Gosport Museum**" together with a **detachable second label stating** what is in the parcel so that the staff at the hospital can give suitable presents to individual people.

### September Coach Trip to Lacock Abbey

The visit to Lacock Abbey south of Chippenham was a wonderful occasion on a perfectly beautiful day. The drive there and back through lovely countryside added immeasurably to the day's enjoyment.

The Abbey, on the outskirts of a very pretty medieval village, was built in 1232 as an Augustinian Nunnery. It flourished until the Dissolution of the Monasteries by Henry VIII when the nuns were pensioned off and the buildings and land sold to William Sharington for £783. He turned it into the family's home, demolishing the church but retaining most of the rest of the abbey and added an octagonal tower, the stable courtyard and a brewery.

By the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> Century the house had passed down through the female line to the Talbot family and it was here in 1835 that William Fox Talbot invented the photographic negative which remained the basis for all photography until the recent introduction of the digital camera and computer generated prints. He was an immensely talented man in many scientific fields but this is the one by which he is best remembered. There is a splendid museum of his work on two floors inside a medieval barn at the entrance to the Abbey grounds.

He also planned and planted a Botanic Garden which is now being reinstated by the National Trust to whom the property was bequeathed on the death in 1945 of Miss Matilda Talbot.

Mary Colyer

## "Nelson - The Admiral and the Man"

There must have been hundreds of talks about Lord Horatio Nelson during the past few months, but I am quite sure that nobody heard a better talk than the Public Lecture given by the Rev'd Peter Wadsworth to the 48 members and guests who attended the Discovery Centre on 12<sup>th</sup> October. He is a complete master of the subject and knew exactly how to lighten the emotional and dramatic account of Nelson's death with accounts of Nelson's humanity and human weaknesses.

Peter Wadsworth's talk was absolutely superb and it is not possible to summarise it. He did say that one of the reasons that Nelson was such a great leader was his ability to communicate his enthusiasm to everybody around him. Peter Wadsworth has the same ability and treated us to an afternoon we will never forget.

Bob Whiteley

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## Natural Science Collections and the Museums Service

*"Why have birds, mammals, insects, rocks and fossils in museum collections?" "If they are not on display what use are they?" "Did you kill it, Mr?" "Why have more than one of each type?"*

These are just a few of the questions I get asked by politicians, museum visitors, students and members of the public; questions that I must quite rightly answer to justify the resources we spend looking after approximately 200,000 natural science items within the collections of Hampshire County Council Museums & Archives Service. I hope this short article, and another in the next newsletter dealing more specifically with the geology collection, will provide at least some of the answers to these and other questions.

Many of you will be aware, I'm sure, that many of the earliest museums around the world were formed to show 'Cabinets of Curiosities' which included exotic natural history specimens from around the globe. This may have been an important way to 'educate the masses' in the pre-television and internet-free days of the nineteenth century but what relevance do these collections have in the modern museum?

We are one of the few museum collections which has bones from an extinct flightless bird called *Raphus cuculatus*, more commonly known as the Dodo. Altogether there are 22 bones given by George Clark to his friend William Curtis in 1867. William Curtis was one of the driving forces behind the development of a museum in Alton which opened in 1880. Following Curtis' death a year later, the museum was renamed the Curtis Museum, one of the founding members of the Museums Service.

An important function of museums is to care for important objects like these which can "... *satisfy our curiosity about the world and enlarge our understanding of the past and present*" to quote Resource, The Council for Museums, Archives and Libraries (*Annual Review 2001/2*, Resource). Indeed, without access to museum preserved remains for analysis, scientists would have been unable to shed new light in recent years on the genetic origins of the Dodo or challenge traditional images of what the bird really looked like.

The same principle should hold true for all collections of biological and geological material. As long as it is a well preserved specimen with good associated locality and other information there is no telling what value it may have in the future. Certainly when George Clarke excavated the bones from the Mare aux Songes marsh in Mauritius he could not possibly have envisaged the evidence they would yield a century later. Similarly, butterflies and moths from our own Hampshire collections collected in the 1920's, 30's and 40's contributed to the English Nature inspired project (Keele University) during the 1990's which investigated

the genetic diversity within and among isolated populations of various Lepidoptera using DNA analysis techniques.

We are also fortunate to have part of the Hart Bird Collection, some of which is on display at the Red House Museum in Christchurch.. This collection contains important Hampshire and national rarities. Considering most of the specimens were collected in the period 1845-80, they are remarkably and unusually well supported by very accurate information, not only the date and collector but also the precise locality where the birds were shot.

Nowadays the mammals and birds we collect have died of natural causes and we refer to such specimens, and indeed any specimens which are the supporting evidence for records and observations, as voucher specimens. These may include the actual specimens referred to in county floras, checklists and survey reports, for example.

A well stored, organised and accurately identified collection of voucher material may also perform another extremely valuable function - as a reference collection. Although many excellent monographs exist which enable the accurate identification of the more popular groups of wildlife there are many less well known, even in the relatively well studied British Isles. For these, identification 'keys' are often unavailable, out-of-date, difficult to use, or scattered through the scientific literature and the only practical means of identification is by reference to another accurately identified specimen. This is especially the case for many groups of invertebrates, lower plants and fossils. Indeed, our natural science reference collections and libraries at Winchester and Gosport are used by more than 500 visitors per year.

Reference collections also provide an extremely valuable resource for training opportunities and one we have utilised in Hampshire since 1994 with a series of identification workshops on a variety of topics, including 'Bumblebees' which was held at SEARCH in April of this year.

All of these aspects of our work - caring for voucher specimens, maintaining reference collections and providing training opportunities - are important as they contribute to our role as a member of the Hampshire Biodiversity Information Centre Partnership ([www.hants.gov.uk/environment/biodiversity](http://www.hants.gov.uk/environment/biodiversity)) HBIC. as it is known, manages wildlife data on behalf of a variety of organisations to support species conservation, habitat management and planning processes in Hampshire.

Notice that I have not so far mentioned the natural history and geology displays in our community museums or the specimens we provide for use in hands-on sessions at SEARCH. These are both very obvious uses of our natural sciences material and I wanted to give an insight into what the rest of our collections are used for.

Unfortunately, I do not have the space here to outline the range of animals, plants, rocks and fossils in our care. However, anyone interested can find a huge amount of information about them by visiting [www.hants.gov.uk/museum/biology](http://www.hants.gov.uk/museum/biology) or [www.hants.gov.uk/museum/geology](http://www.hants.gov.uk/museum/geology). We are also very pleased to provide access to the collections for both individuals and groups by appointment with me.

Next time..... more about the Museums Service's geology collection and the dedicated work undertaken by the late Dave Kemp during his 14 years as Keeper of Geology.

**Chris Palmer, Senior Keeper of Natural Sciences**

## Curator's Corner

Dear Everyone,

I hope you have all managed to visit the 'Across the Board' exhibition - or are planning to do so. I've just been in the Gosport Gallery watching a class of 4 year olds having a great time as part of specially developed activities by SEARCH based on 'Across the Board'.

The article above from the Hampshire Museums and Archives giving information about some of the behind the scenes work which goes into the delivery of a modern Museums Service. I hope you enjoy reading it.

Sorry this report is a bit shorter than usual but I have been on leave for a while. We stayed at Bodrum in Turkey which has some fabulous underwater archaeology displays in its ancient castle. We also visited Ephesus, an incredible Roman site with lots of restoration work going on. A bit of a busman's holiday really!

See you at the Christmas party on December 14<sup>th</sup> !

Oonagh



One of the most beautiful buildings in Ephesus must be the Library of Celsus built in 135 A.D. The façade shown in the photograph taken nearly twenty years ago has been meticulously restored - all the columns had collapsed before restoration work began.

I hope that if I am fortunate enough to visit it again I won't find somebody has turned this lovely Library into a Discover Centre !

Bob Whiteley

**Please send contributions for the Newsletter to Bob Whiteley, FGM Newsletter Editor  
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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**