

FRIENDS OF GOSPORT MUSEUM

NEWSLETTER

November 2006

Friends Christmas Party

In Search Building, Clarence Road
3 p.m. to 5 p.m.
Wednesday 13th 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 be in Gosport War Memorial Hospital over Christmas. 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 patients.

ILLUSTRATED TALK

"HMS Warrior"

by Maurice Huty

Wednesday 7th March 2007
at 7.30 pm
in The Discovery Centre

Admission Free

All Welcome

September Coach Trip to Chawton and Alton

We were lucky with the day in two ways; weatherwise it was a perfect summer's day, and also the fact that quite by chance I picked the day that the Chawton Big House, home of Jane Austen's brother, was open free to the public for Heritage Days.

Some of the party decided to stay in Chawton for lunch and a visit in the afternoon to Jane Austen's cottage, while the rest of the party went on to Alton for a few hours, for lunch and a visit to a place of interest of their own choice. For some it was the Curtis Museum, others the Allen Gallery. I also popped into the impressive Parish Church, scene of a skirmish in the Civil War. A Royalist soldier was killed on the steps of the pulpit - so much for a place of sanctuary.

Following this overview there are some impressions from members of the party of different aspects of the day. As usual I give a sigh of relief when we return without crises and as the conventional school child's essay used to say "tired but happy !"

Mary Duly

Chawton House and Garden

After a beautiful drive up the Meon Valley in dappled sunshine we arrived at Chawton House to find it in festival mood - it was an Open Day with free entry to the public.

The house was owned in the 18th Century by the Knight family who adopted Jan Austen's brother Edward as they had no son of their own to whom to leave the estate. Gradually the house fell into disrepair until it was rescued recently by a wealthy American woman called Sandy Lerner. She has a great interest in women novelists and it must have been the Jane Austen connection that inspired her to renovate the house. This she has done magnificently.

The entrance hall is imposing and from there you walk through a series of beautifully furnished rooms until you come to the working part of the house. There is a huge kitchen with a splendid iron range along one wall, and beyond that the dairy, the laundry and a room for keeping bees indoors during the winter months. Finally there is a well which has been restored to working order.

Outside are a series of charming brick terraced gardens before you come to the extensive grounds with beautiful views in all directions. I feel we all owe Mrs Lerner a debt of gratitude for saving this beautiful mansion from decay.

Mary Colyer

Visit to Chawton Village

My friend and I elected to spend the whole day in Chawton. We visited Chawton House, the former home of Jane Austen's brother, and afterwards in beautiful sunshine we toured its grounds and gardens. We had lunch in the Courtyard Restaurant and then visited the Church and graves of members of the Austen family.

We watched some cart horses being shod and learnt that they are used on the Estate to pull the grass cutters. Also we did catch a fleeting view of Sandy Lerner, the American heiress, who purchased Chawton House saving it from demolition. This is now used as an educational centre and has a most comprehensive collection of valuable books, antique furniture and pictures.

The charming cottage nearby where Jane Austen spent part of her life contains many of her personal possessions. After a short lecture we were able to tour the property and small garden. Several of her books and writings were on display, including her writing desk and personal letters. We came away feeling that Jane, her mother and her sister had had a happy life at Chawton and my resolve is to read her books again !!

The whole trip was most interesting and we can also recommend the cream teas at Cassandra's tea shop opposite the cottage.

Brenda M Smith

Alton Museum

The Museum is housed in an appropriately old building at a quiet end of Alton High Street and one wanders around its small rooms and passages. It contained a far greater number of exhibits than one would have expected from the size of the building. These ranged from ancient fossils and exhibits about the early days of the area including the old stage coach routes (and although Gosport was mentioned it did not appear to be on the main route) to old toys of the 1930s and 40s. Apart from the old dolls and teddy bears there were interesting children's bricks - early Leggo perhaps ?

One interesting exhibit featured Jimmy Dickinson - born in Alton and a very popular figure who played football for Portsmouth and England in the 1940s - affectionately named Gentleman Jim. Photographs of the team included other well known players such as Tom Finney. His big red woollen socks were there and one wonders how they could kick a ball with such a weight dragging their feet down !

One amusing detail we discovered was that "Sweet Fanny Adams" (of the well known expression) was an inhabitant of Alton and is buried in the churchyard there - the expression is based on fact !

It would be nice to go again and study more closely the varied exhibits of interest - to be able to concentrate, cogitate and quietly reminisce - as we were once able to do in our own museum - remember ?!!

Jan Jarvis and Joan Smith

The Allen Gallery

The coach trip to Chawton last month was interesting and enjoyable. It's always a pleasure to be one of the organised rather than the person responsible for doing the organising, so well done Mary !

From my point of view the restoration of Chawton House is a marvel. I first went there about ten years ago with the Hampshire Field Club when the house was totally derelict and a sad sight. Due to the efforts of Hampshire County Council and English Heritage among others, including descendants of the Knight family, the resultant transformation is magnificent.

Much as I love Chawton Cottage and all the Austen Memorabilia, I opted for a trip to Alton and was delighted with the Allen Gallery and its superb collection of ceramics and pottery ranging over several centuries and from both Europe and the East. The displays were meticulously labelled and the staff knowledgeable and helpful. I shall certainly be back for another look.

Lesley Burton

Rosemarie Gibaud

Rosemarie has arrived safely at last at her new home, not far from Norwich but, more importantly, next door to her very good old Gosport friend Roz Teague. The move was not without its problems. It should have taken place in early July, but an unexpected snag in the new bungalow delayed proceedings.

We shall miss Rosemarie, such a loyal, reliable interesting person. She had worked for some years at the front desk of the Museum, was a founder member of the Friends of Gosport Museum and served on its committee from the beginning.

There was always some interesting story to learn. Do you know anyone else who had personal advice on a painting problem from no less a person than Augustus John ? As a young girl she had found herself standing in front of a - I think - a Botticelli painting at the Royal Academy. The old man near her asked why she frowned. "How did Botticelli get a certain effect ?" she said. He told her how it was done; it was Augustus John himself who explained it.

Our good wishes go with Rosemarie - and her beloved cats of course.

Mary Duly

Visit to Milestones Museum - Sunday 8th October

Although the invitation to a Friends and Volunteers Day at Milestones Museum was received quite late Joan Russell organised a mini-bus, phoned various "Friends" and started work on a display showing the transition of Gosport Museum to the Discovery Centre. As always, a super display and it is hoped that we might be able to mount it at the Christmas Party so that everyone can see it.

It was a splendid day out - we were made to feel very welcome by the Museum Staff and volunteers. We met up with other "Friends" groups, notably those from Havant Museum and the Curtis and Allan Museum at Alton. Suffice to say, there were many signatures on the petition to keep Havant Museum from closure.

Milestones is very well worth a visit. Cobbles streets, tramlines, trolley bus, buses, shops, post office, foundry, working pub, working sweet shop circa 1942 with, of course, rationing - 2oz of cough candy was 60p - modern price but absolutely delicious.

Mary Payne

Curator's Corner October 2006

In my last report I said that the new Community Curator (Museum Development) was due to take up post in October. Sadly, the person appointed had to withdraw unexpectedly. However- hot off the press! it looks as though someone else has now been appointed. No details yet but hopefully 2007 will begin with Gosport having its full complement of museum staff.

'Passion for Pattern' is doing well in the Gosport Gallery. The Gosport Gallery has itself been improved with new panels on the walls and new lighting. Obviously most visitors won't know this but the overall effect for exhibitions is much improved. We are very grateful to the HMAS technical team for doing the work and the Area Investment Fund for giving us the money.

'Passion for Pattern' will be followed from January 17 to March 17, 2007 by 'What's in the Book? The seventeen million books of Janet and Allan Ahlberg'. Janet and Allan Ahlberg produced wonderful illustrated books for children, some of which you may be familiar with e.g. Funnybones or Burglar Bill. The exhibition shows beautiful original illustrations from their books.

Then we have another British Museum special - 'The Greeks' (working title) from March 31 to June 30. The Gosport Gallery will be the first venue for this exhibition which is very exciting. As with 'Across the Board', it comes with additional funding for schools and extra promotion. Of course, there is no substitute for word of mouth in getting people to visit exhibitions so I am sure you will all do your best in this way.

Laura Wilson, our AIF funded Gosport Gallery Community Outreach Worker, is continuing to work with many different types of groups, providing art-based workshops and encouraging them to visit the Gosport Gallery and the Discovery Centre in general.

I hope those of you who attended the Friends and Volunteers Day at Milestones had a great time - and thank you for going to fly the flag for Gosport Museum. I couldn't go because I had prior family commitments but the feedback has been very positive.

Oonagh

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**Please send contributions for the Newsletter
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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**

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