

Issue 6

Autumn 1996

The Penny-Farthing



The Magazine of Maldon District Museum Association

Heralding The Opening Of The Museum At Prom Lodge



An Interesting Hobby Meeting Interesting People

The response to our earlier request for volunteers to steward in the new premises was encouraging. A few more would be useful. In addition, two or three 'specialists' (e.g. ex-teachers) as guides to pre-booked mainly school parties, would be most welcome.

Our Stewardship Secretary, Betty Chittenden, will be pleased to hear from you, ring her on Maldon 858 722.

From The Chairman Paddy Lacey

The anniversary of the Museum's move from 'Spindles' is fast approaching and the opening of the Museum's new permanent home is in sight. Much has been achieved in the past year with the opportunity being taken to record and collate our collection of exhibits both large and small by the team led by Penny Cook, assisted by Len Barrell, which has been working for many mornings in rooms at St. Cedd's Centre, loaned by the District Council.

The list of our holdings is now recorded on computer and in book form, is far more accurate than it has ever been and will be of great value in answering the many queries which come the way of the museum, as well as ensuring that the whereabouts of any artefact is known. We should record our thanks to all who have helped with this continuing task.

Now to the opening... When will this be? ... It's up to you! ...

At the time of writing the District Council has nearly completed the work it can do within the allotted budget and it's up to the Museum Association to complete the task of making good, making secure, decorating, and installing our exhibits, all within the limits of our own finances. Talents of all kinds are urgently needed. Please let us know if you can help.

Have you looked in your attic or loft lately?

Do members or friends have any of the following items they would like to donate to the museum; for our 'Maldon At War' display? :

- *Five rolls of matching wallpaper 1940s / early 50s type, floral or patterned.*
- *Chenille type table cover.*
- *Small 1930s / 40s type wireless (it doesn't need to work)*
- *Any WWII household items in good condition.*
- *1930s / 40s Ladies handbag, in good condition.*
- *Identity cards, ration books, etc.*
- *Anything else you think will be of interest for the exhibition.*

Please contact Judy Tullett on 858 690.

News by Terry Chapman

With departure to NZ now planned at around February I have somehow been conned into editing this issue of the Pennyfarthing. The main advantage of editing is however that you get an opportunity to write your own page, so I thought I would tell you about progress with getting the Prom Lodge ready for occupation:

Firstly the modifications to the building:

As you may know, the main entrance to the museum is to be the old side entrance access to the RADAR toilet, and a couple of disgusting public cubicles, one of which had the light on permanently as the switch had rotted on. These old toilets have been exterminated and knocked through into what was at one time the Hockey Club Changing Room, which has been gutted and is now referred to as 'The Long Hall' - this was an unexpected bonus as it was not originally expected that this would be converted in this phase. The RADAR toilet has been reduced in size, to allow a new hallway through into what was the kitchen., the whole forming a spacious entrance that will include the Sales Desk, Museum Shop display, and Maritime Exhibition. This all cost more than expected, as a difference in floor levels, not apparent at first meant that the floor of the Long Hall had to be raised, and therefore the ceiling had to be raised also. The Long Hall has gained a pair of double doors to be used as an emergency exit, opening out into what was once the garden, now referred to as 'The Courtyard.'. This exit is above ground level so a disabled access slope is required. Unfortunately, as such slopes must have a maximum incline of 1 in 12, the unexpected raising of the Long Hall floor by 12 inches meant the slope had to be 12 feet longer than expected. At one time we envisaged the Courtyard disappearing under what would have looked like a multi-storey car park, but the problem was alleviated by bending the slope back on itself along the side of the building. All internal doors have been replaced with new ones with heavily sprung closers (for fire safety reasons) and easier to use handles (for disability reasons). Lets hope the disabled have the strength to cope with the door closers - we all find then a bit of a strain. The upstairs bathroom has been converted into an office, with the toilet and bath removed, and a new sink installed (so we can make tea and coffee and wash up. The front of the building has had the path widened and block paved, which necessitated a new brick retaining wall to support the iron railings fronting the footpath. Maldon District Council have spent more than they envisaged, so we have had to economise in the area of making the windows secure. It was intended to fit the downstairs windows with iron grills, but we have now settled for internal wooden shutters - which are quite good as we wanted to reduce the window area and light in some areas.

Then a bit of bad news:

The Edwardian fireplace in one of the front rooms, which was to be an Edwardian period room, has been stolen. The fireplace is now boarded up. A replacement fireplace may be fitted later. The outbuilding, which we had hoped to utilise at some point (although it is not part of the current planning consent) was halfway through being reroofed when some local yobos set fire to the roof. During the process of putting the fire out the weaker part of the fence topped stone wall was pushed over. Subsequently it was decided (by MDC) to demolish all of it - and it is being replaced by an all wooden fence. For more details contact MDC, the wall's owner, which turned out not to be MDC, but the landlord of the flats next door.

Continued

MDC were advised by the Police that the security of the museum grounds could be improved by either

- a) Making the perimeter really secure (e.g. 10' steel fencing, razor wire), or
- b) Making them more visible to the public and patrol cars by lowering the height of the fencing and removing bushes screening the grounds from public gaze.

Option b was selected. It is ironic that our (over enthusiastic?) trimming of the undergrowth was described by MDC as Horticultural Damage'. Their latest activity has been described by a member of the public who had donated us some plants, once growing in what is now a 'flat' area, as 'Horticultural Annihilation, or 'throwing away the baby with the bath water'. Oh well.

What we've been doing, or will be doing shortly:

- Painting the window side of the wooden shutters mat black, so the windows don't look like a boarded-up building, but instead are 'invisible' as they just look like a dark interior.
- Powerwash the outside brickwork.
- Seeking grant aid and sponsorship for some of the following:
- Fitting halogen security lights to the outside of the building.
- Fitting a burglar alarm.
- Fit display lighting
- Fitting security cameras inside to all rooms.
- Obtaining a new computer so I can stop doing this when I'm in New Zealand.
- Sealing and painting the rather dusty new concrete floor of the Long Hall.
- Papering and painting the inside of the window shutters.
- General repainting and redecorating the interior.
- Making a sales desk.
- Making a display for the Museum Shop.
- Fitting out 'The Hide' display.
- Staging the 'Maldon At War' exhibition.
- Setting up the Maritime Display.
- Producing a new Maldon Priory wall display.
- Producing a completely renovated 'History of Maldon' wall display.



Brown Bess

One of the two most famous muskets was the British Brown Bess which dominated the battlefields of Europe, America and India from the early 1700s until 1815, and continued to see action in minor engagements even later. Evidently adopted in the reign of Queen Anne, who came to the throne in 1702, the original *Brown Bess* was officially designated The Long Land Musket and is often called the first model Brown Bess.

The earliest dateable specimens were made during the late 1720s. No one knows how the nickname originated. The legend that Bess stood for Queen Elizabeth seems unlikely since she had been dead for more than a century. Soldiers frequently gave their guns pet names and it seems likely that Brown Bess was simply the affectionate nickname given by the British Trooper to his wonderfully effective musket.

This exhibition label belongs to a gun which is on record and which was in an exhibition about twelve year ago but which seems to have disappeared. It could have been loaned to someone, contact Len Barrell if you have any information

Registration News by Len Barrell

At the time of writing, our comprehensive 'stock check' is all but complete, the updated Accessions Register has been compiled and two copies expertly bound by member George Ginn, to whom sincere thanks.

The use of the original MM series of numbers was dropped after 31st March 1996. This ensured coverage of the total collection in hand on the 31st August 1995 plus a few items received meanwhile. Everything received since 31st March is covered by the new documentation and numbering in accordance with the MGC recommendations.

We are now racking, checking artefact numbering, and the Register entries.

The Maldon Society Visit To Harwich by Penny Cook

On the 13th July, seventeen members of the Maldon Society journeyed to Harwich for a guided tour of the Harwich Maritime Trail.

We met beneath the *High Lighthouse* at 10.00 am, and were welcomed by a member of the Harwich Society, who was to be our guide during a very interesting visit.

The High Lighthouse, erected in 1818, has in recent years become a privately owned Museum, housing outmoded radios and television sets. Across the town green lies the *Low Lighthouse*, now a Maritime Museum. The two Lighthouses acted as leading marks, guiding vessels around the difficult shoals off Landguard Point, until they were superseded in 1863 by the Dovercourt Lights. We would have stayed longer admiring the maritime collection but there was much to see on the Heritage Trail and we had to move on.

Next on our itinerary - The Treadwheel Crane, built at the local shipbuilding yard in 1667. It was operated by two men walking inside twin wooden treadwheels and apparently still in use until the early part of this century. The crane has been lovingly restored and now resides majestically on Harwich Green.

The church of St. Nicholas was our next port of call and although there has been a church on the site since the Middle Ages, the present church is a relatively recent construction c 1821. At the west end of the church is a wonderful display of 17th century blue and white Dutch Delft tiles, depicting biblical scenes.

On then to Angelgate, to view the cottages built in 1858, as a local coastguard station. The land on which they stand had been the site of a former government cement works and later, army quarters for the adjacent Angelgate Battery. The Angelgate cottages are of a particularly attractive design, built in Suffolk brick and forming an open sided courtyard.

Now quickly on to the Electric Palace, a beautiful restored example of one of the earliest cinemas in Britain. The Electric Palace has survived virtually unchanged since 1911. Like so many of the historic attractions in Harwich, the Electric Palace has been painstakingly restored by volunteers from the Harwich Society. The restoration took place during the 1970s and 1980s, after it had stood derelict for many years. Customers can now enjoy up to date films and occasional live performances, surrounded by the magnificent gilt and plaster work of Edwardian days. The Maldon Society was treated to a short slide show, illustrating the enormous amount of hard work and expertise which had been necessary to achieve the final result.

Having rested our tired feet in the cool of the cinema's auditorium, we turned into Wellington Road to admire the Harwich Mural. The wall painting which shows cameo scenes of the town's history, was commissioned by the Harwich Society and originally painted by Harwich School pupils in 1982. It was redesigned 13 years later and the colourful portrayal is well worth viewing.

The last stop on our trail, accompanied by our guide, was the water front - taking in the Navy Yard wharf, which had been the naval shipyard between 1660 and 1827, and just around the corner, the Quay, with views of the harbour, Shotley and Orwell. The pretty Victorian ticket office on the Ha'penny Pier, built in 1884, would once have taken the passenger fares for the first steamship ferries to the continent.

Exhausted, but happy, we bade farewell to the guide and swiftly sought the nearest presentable hostelry to replenish those parts in need of restoration.

We had a wonderful day, many thanks to June Prime for organising our trip. I must admit that Ken and I did go on to visit the Guild Hall and the Redoubt but that particular recount will have to be left for another day.

The Battle Of Maldon Is Now

*Art Deco cinema, sadly no more,
A wonderful Wurlitzer rose from the floor.
Poor 'Chequers' met a dreadful fate
Antiquity revealed too late.
Wisteria-clad Gas House fell.
For Ironworks dwellings tolled the knell.
Hideous block by Halfway Farm
Cramped, ghastly cells, devoid of charm.
Now myopic, mindless fools
Would raze Victorian Infants School.
Tesco's bulk affronts the eye.
Lost so much of days gone by.
Casualties of selfish greed.
Maldon people please take heed.*

Can any reader please tell the rest of us who wrote this, when, and what development prompted it?

Displays In The New Museum

by Judy Tullett

With the opening of the museum not too far off now, we are hoping to display artefacts both familiar and not so familiar to our members and general public.

We have more room than ever before: in the main part of the Lodge we have two rooms downstairs, and three rooms and a small office upstairs.

Downstairs: One area will depict the history of our town and notable characters, up to and including Victorian and Edwardian Maldon. Another area will be given over to the theme 'Maldon At War' this will include a room set of a typical 1930s/40s living room with interesting items from that period. Other war related artefacts from both world wars will also be displayed.

Upstairs: One room, termed 'The Hide' will display some of our stuffed birds and mammals against a painted backdrop of local marshland. Tony Froom who is organizing this display tells me: 'The project is being aided by two local young naturalists. They expect it to hatch sometime next year, but the shell should be visible soon.'

One of the other upstairs rooms will be given over to the Margery Allingham Society, for their display of items from Margery's Tolleshunt D'Arcy home, and information about her writing career, and that of her artist husband, who designed the dust covers for her books. The linking of Maldon District Museum with the Margery Allingham Society will also bring fresh interest to the museum. There is also an interesting link with our famous Dr. Salter. See the feature on the Society elsewhere in this issue.

The remainder of the lower part of the lodge will house the entrance desk, Museum Shop, and a maritime display depicting the lives and boats of the fishermen and bargemen of Maldon.

We are hoping to start work next year on the Long Hall room at the Museum, where we are intending to erect a mock-up of an old Maldon High Street scene, complete with shop fronts acting as show cases, for example Drapers, Cobblers, and General Store. Hopefully we will be able to display our pump-type fire engine for the first time in the museum. Lots to look forward to!!

A Gift From Mersea

A few weeks ago our Secretary received a phone call from the Director of Mersea Island Museum offering a collection of historical costume items 'made up for use in the last Mersea Coronation Pageant'.

We have now received confirmation that Mersea has approved the gift of these items, which would be very suitable for such as children to dress in, and Judy will no doubt have arranged for collection by the time you read this.

Mersea Museum is open every day between 2.00 and 5.00 p.m., except Mondays and Tuesdays.

The Margery Allingham Society

by B.A. Pike

The Margery Allingham Society was founded in 1988 by Mrs. Pat Watt, to celebrate the life and work of one of the most distinguished of all mystery writers. Margery was born in Ealing but was raised in Essex, the county that remained her home for the rest of her life. From 1934 to her death in 1966 at the age of 63 she lived at D'Arcy House in Tolleshunt D'Arcy, where in 1992 the Society arranged for a commemorative plaque to be mounted. She was born into a literary family and was a published author while still a child. Her first novel appeared in 1923, when she was nineteen, but her first mystery, *The White Cottage Mystery*, was not published until 1928. Thereafter, most of her books were crime stories of one kind or another, from a series of exuberant early thrillers, through a run of highly polished 'mysteries of manners' to the deeper, darker and more complex novels of the post-war years. *The Oaken Hear*, which appeared in 1940, is a notable account of rural Essex coming to grips with the onset of war.

Throughout the three decades since her death her work has continued in print and she remains a popular and well-regarded mystery writer. Eight of her *Campion* books were adapted for television in 1989 with Peter Davison as Albert Campion, a nobleman who cuts loose from his aristocratic background and goes his own adventurous way. A number of books have been adapted for radio, and films have been made of *Room To Let* and *The Tiger In The Smoke*. Most of her books are available as audio-books.

The Society aims to keep alive interest in, and appreciation of, Margery Allingham who is a most delightful writer: a thoroughgoing professional, who produced a distinguished body of work that continues to give pleasure to a discriminating audience. Members meet twice a year, for an excursion into Allingham country and an Autumn dinner in London. The Society's journal, 'The Bottle Street Gazette' published twice a year. Anyone who would like to know more is warmly invited to write to Mrs. Pat Watt, 3, Corringham Road, Wembley Middlesex HA9 9PX. Leaflets will also be available at the museum. We look forward to hearing from you.

The display at Maldon will illustrate comprehensively the life and work of Margery, in addition it will celebrate the achievement of her husband, Philip Yongman Carter, a considerable figure in his own right, as artist, writer, and editor. He edited 'The Tatler' and designed the dustwrappers for hundreds of books, including most of those of his wife. After her death he completed her last novel and wrote two new adventures for Albert Campion.

Did You Know

Two daily half-hour programmes of speech and music, including a broadcast by the opera singer Dame Nellie Melba, were broadcast from Chelmsford for about a year in 1919/20.

Such antisocial and dangerous activity was banned by the Post Office until thousands of radio amateurs petitioned for regular broadcasts. Starting on February 14th 1922 the Marconi Company was allowed to broadcast for 15 minutes a week - from a hut in Writtle - and the BBC was formed later that year.

Charles Grigg Tait by Len Barrell

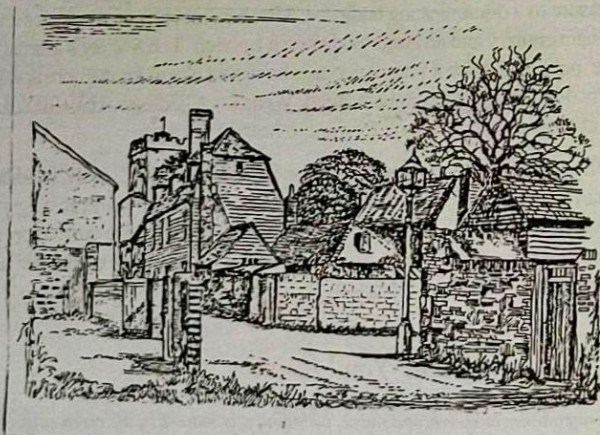
By now the vast majority of members will be aware of the death of Charles Tait in Broomfield Hospital on the 12th May. He was until a few weeks earlier quite sprightly despite his eighty years, an age which comparatively few of us expect to attain, but nevertheless hope to nowadays.

Those of us who knew him from post war days will reflect that he, at least outwardly, appeared to ride the years almost effortlessly, despite his ever-increasing involvement with almost all aspects of historical Maldon, predominately visual. These have been listed in varying degrees of detail in many other accounts of his life and need not be repeated here.

We have however wondered at the absence of any report on Charles' earlier involvement with the Austin 7 Owners' world. He was for many years a keen, almost fanatically, enthusiastic owner of Austin 7s, and collected, fully renovated and occasionally resold one, when, we suspect, he had no room for more. He presumably disposed of them all when he turned over his garage to his numerous sketches and paintings. How many of those cars, we wonder, are still in existence and on display?

Little mention either of his other attributes in the world, for example DIY. Very few jobs about the house were beyond his capabilities, and most of his car engineering was carried out with only the occasional help or advice of a specialist.

Our thoughts are with Joy and the family, but whilst Maldon will miss 'Charlie Tait', his artistic reminders will with us for years to come.



Working With Schools Training Session

by Betty Chillenden

I could talk to you for an hour and then only be summarising the bombardment of words we received in the five hours of this study day!

If we want to gear ourselves up to cater for schools, and I don't mean just the local ones, there is money to be made, but we have got to be aware of the content of the National Curriculum and make sure we have a good exhibition which fits in with some part of it. We have got to have good, child oriented guides who will keep the interest of the children and take pressure off the teachers - that is what they want and they will use us again and recommend us if we do. We've got to have facilities, including toilets, to cope with two classes at a time, as schools want to save on the cost of trips by filling a coach. We've got to have eye-catching publicity material which will grab the attention of a busy head teacher. We need stock to fit in with what the teachers want.

If we decide to fulfil all these criteria there are all sorts of back-up facilities we can plug into to help us; such as schools circulation set-up which gets our publicity stuff as far round the county as we want it. We can get information a year ahead as to what TV programmes for schools are going to be shown and link in an exhibition with one of those. We can get details of how to buy in professionals and then charge the schools. We were told there is a wide open market for Key Stage 1 children, that is infants aged 5-7, because few museums offer them much and if we can, then we'll get them in.

I don't know a lot yet about how we are going to lay out the museum, but if you want to see a prime example of a child oriented one I thoroughly recommend a visit to Saffron Walden.

My gut reaction to the training day though was that the concept is not for us - at present, but we might well consider, later on, doing something on the lines of selecting a special section of the National Curriculum which is not being generally catered for by other museums and cashing in on it, the way Saffron Walden are doing with their Ancient Greeks and Ancient Egypt exhibitions. Since they set them up they have been booked solid with schools visits because no other museum in Essex has anything similar. We have all the details in the packs we were given that show what periods of history each Key Stage covers, *but* all this does cost a lot of money and we have got to get it absolutely right if we are going to get that money back.

Oneupwomanship

Conversation reported between two ladies seated at a table in Harrods Tea-room:

"We have swans on our lake. Do you have swans on your lake, Elsie?"

"Only on the smallest one."