

The Museletter

November/December 2014



Beau Street hoard draws visitors

On Saturday 18 October 265 people beat a path to our museum, to see Roman silver coins which had been buried in Bath nearly 2,000 years ago.

The Roman Baths Museum have put together a brilliant exhibition which tells the history of these 17,500 coins, hidden some 150 metres from the Roman Baths during the third century AD.

Nobody knows quite why coins were buried in this way in the Roman world.

Many hoards have been found, mostly in fields by metal 'detectorists'. This hoard is unusual in that it was discovered by archaeologists. In November 2007 the site of the new Spa Hotel was the subject of a rescue dig. The hotel was being built opposite the Thermae Bath Spa in Beau Street, Bath. The archaeologists came across silver coins spilling out from a large solid lump of what appeared to be soil in a corner between two walls, probably the corner of a room.

The entire section was raised and taken away for conservation and research. It was X-rayed at the British Museum. Eventually the size and importance of the hoard was revealed. It appeared that the coins had been carefully placed in eight leather purses. These had fused together in the soil into one heavy lump.

After a long and painstaking process of conservation, during which the coins were separated and cleaned, they were returned to the Roman Baths Museum. The Museum, having obtained grants, purchased the Hoard and will be displaying it later in 2015. Meanwhile they are taking their Beau Street Hoard Road Show around the Bath area, giving many people the chance to experience it first hand.

During our Bradford 'Hoard Day' children had a



There's nothing like holding history in your hands, as visitors to the Beau Street Hoard exhibition discovered

chance to make replica Roman style purses and to strike replica coins to put inside. One visiting family made a good point, that is they were very fortunate to experience the Coin Hoard here in Bradford as, being a family of five, they could not afford to go to the Roman Baths to see it. The 17,500 coins had stayed in their hiding place for almost 2,000 years, and now we can hold them, learn about them and wonder about the story of their concealment in a building near the Roman Baths around 274 AD.

Gill Winfield

Winter closing

The museum is now tucked up for its annual winter closure, and will reopen on Wednesday 14 January, so we hope to see you in the New Year if not before! The closure will allow Roger Clark to work his usual magic on shoehorning in more exhibits, as well as improving the storage and sales areas.

The museum opening times can be found on our website: <http://www.bradfordonavonmuseum.co.uk/how-to-find-us>

Campus update

We have had some very disappointing news from Wiltshire Council on the proposed campus programme. It now appears that only eight campuses will be going ahead, because of budgetary restraints. They are: Corsham, Melksham, Cricklade, Calne, Pewsey, Malmesbury, Salisbury and Tisbury. However, BOACAN (Bradford on Avon Community Area Network) and the Campus Operations Board – which includes town and county councillors and representatives of community groups in Bradford and the surrounding villages – are working hard to put together a revised scheme. This could be based around existing buildings, possibly making use of the land around the health centre/station car park/fire station as part of the Neighbourhood Plan and in consultation with Bradford on Avon Development Trust.

In the meantime, we are on the verge of agreeing a new lease on the current museum premises.

Our museum's vision, mission and accreditation

The Museum Accreditation Group has been working hard over the past few months to complete the required work, and our re-accreditation application is now being submitted to the Arts Council on behalf of the museum trustees.

This has been a long a complicated process, and thanks are due to everyone who has been involved.

At the same time, a museum prospectus has been produced and will be made available to museum members, town and county councillors, museum ambassadors and others.

A vision and mission statement for the museum have also been drawn up, as follows:

Vision

To explore, understand, and share the rich heritage of the Bradford Hundred with its community and with visitors.

Mission Statement

To provide an environment that ensures the long term sustainability of the Museum by:

- Continuing to attract and cultivate scholarship and expertise, and promoting innovation.
- Encouraging and developing the activities of the Museum's interest groups, increasing

knowledge, participation and creativity.

- Interpreting, and continuously developing, the Museum's collection, and displaying it in an engaging and accessible way.
- Engaging in educational projects which share the history and knowledge of the Bradford Hundred.
- Seeking collaboration with other organisations to promote and enhance the work of the Museum, and benefit the community.
- Organising and promoting a broad programme of events, special exhibitions, conferences, talks and activities.

Community dig was a big success

First, very many thanks not only to the diggers who took part in the August community dig, but also to those of you who volunteered to greet visitors and explain what we were up to! One especially valuable outcome was local people bringing in finds – and we were knocked backwards when we were shown a coin of King Aethelred found in a garden in Frome Road. The dig seemed fairly tame until the last minute, and then mysteries emerged. In the area of the new community orchard, our trench exposed a very odd deep-cut feature, with the appearance of two intersecting circular pits, tight-packed with limestone rubble. Intriguingly, one fragment from this filling appears to be an architectural piece.

The packed stone must represent some sort of foundation but clearly of a complex structure, not the simple wall foundation that we found in April. One theory is that we may have stumbled

upon the location of an entrance or gateway to the defensive bank discovered previously. The second shock was another element parallel to the ancient bank that flanks the east wall of Hen Field. We had seen before a stone feature, thought to be a wall foundation, but this time we dug it out, only to find that the stone was the back fill of a wide trench dug with vertical sides. Such a trench must have been cut to contain the foundation for a substantial and well-built wall, presumably removed by stone robbers at some later date.

One piece of pottery found deep in the filling dates from about the time of the tithe barn, so maybe our wall predated the barn and was robbed out by the tithe barn builders. What was this structure? We need to give this a lot more thought, and on both counts do some more digging!

Roy Canham

Briefly ...

Our latest museum publication is a monograph entitled *Anglo-Saxon Bradford-on-Avon*, by Martyn and Hannah Whittock. It is on sale at the Museum and Ex Libris Bookshop at £3.00. There is more information on our website: <http://www.bradfordonavonmuseum.co.uk/archives/8944>

We had a very successful stall at the annual St Laurence School Street Party in Church Street on Saturday 27 September, with much interest from adults and children alike. In addition to the handling tray and museum leaflets, we had a tray of objects Roger Clark has dug up in his garden, which generated a lot of comments. We also sold quite a number of our museum publications.

The annual stewards' party will take place on Thursday 15 January 2015, in the library meeting room. This is a great opportunity to get together with your fellow stewards, meet the trustees, and enjoy some delicious food, drink and entertainment. We look forward to seeing you there.

The monthly stewards' catch-up mornings at the Swan Hotel on the third Monday of every month will be continuing into the new year. These are completely informal gatherings – just come along any time between 10am and noon, buy yourself a coffee and meet your fellow volunteers.



Emma Oliver, from Wimborne in Dorset, visited the museum one Sunday over the summer and took half a dozen wonderful photos of the chemist's shop, which she kindly sent us. Sunday afternoon sessions at the museum are often great fun, with lots of visitors from far afield, as well as local people popping in for a look round and to share their memories of Bradford past. Mary Clark and Gillian King will have the calendar for the whole of 2015 available soon, so stewards can sign up for slots – weekdays as well as Sundays, of course – well in advance.

Museum trustees:

John Banks: 863134

Roy Canham: 866748

Chris Dale (Hon Treasurer): 862198

Mervyn Harris (Hon Chairman): 863440

Sophie Hawke: 863934

Ivor Slocombe: 862525

Kate Turnbull (Membership): 866328

Gill Winfield: 868179

Roger Clark (Hon Curator): 865785

Mary Clark (Stewards' organiser): 865785

Gillian King (Stewards' organiser): 866387

Joceline Bury (PR & Newsletter): 867348

Discussion Group

First Wednesday of the month, 7.30pm

Discussion Group continues to cover a wide range of subjects. Since the last Museletter, we have had sessions on Roman Bathing, led by Laura Mountford, and on Land Art, led by Sue Maude.

The meetings take place on the first Wednesday of each month at 7.30pm in the library meeting room, and are FREE to members. Non-members can attend one session before being asked to join. If you know of someone who isn't a member, do bring them along – it's a great introduction to the Museum.

In order to continue providing sessions on wide range of topics in 2015, we need your help! If you would like to suggest a topic, or would like to offer to lead a session, please contact Kate Turnbull (museum trustee) on 01225 866328 or at turnbullke@googlemail.com