

Elstree & Borehamwood Museum Friends Newsletter January 2015 Issue Number 7



HAPPY BIRTHDAY TO YOU!

It is hard to believe that on 18th November the museum celebrated its first birthday. Since opening on that date in 2013 more than 7000 people have visited and enjoyed the exhibitions. The Elstree Screen Heritage event was well received and finished on the weekend of the 20th September after a run of 3 months.

The displays were removed and will be used for future presentations in other venues. Exhibits that were stored at the Balmoral Drive storage facility were then returned to the museum and preparation began for the installation of the '75 years of Hillside' exhibition which opened as planned on Saturday, 4th October.

This has proved a very popular event as so many Borehamwood residents have attended the school. Well presented information boards show a timeline of major events in the history of the school from its opening in 1939 until its gates were finally closed in 2000. In one dramatic event in 1940 the children had to remain at the school, due to the proximity of enemy planes and local gunfire, until the 'all clear' was sounded. There are photographs, memorabilia and a film showing a random look at Hillside through the years in pictures and video clips. It includes a short interview with Olive Earwood who started at the school the day it opened in 1939. Due to serious illness it was her first experience at school ever - must have been quite a day!

On Wednesday 29th October, Keith Newson and Tim Westrip, ex Headmasters of Hillside school, Barry Smallwood, Head of Music from 1966-1974 and ex pupils visited the exhibition. Paul Welsh, governor of the school for many

years also made an appearance and it was quite a reunion.

Keith Newson and museum volunteer Matt Caro collaborated to present the exhibition and it was a pleasure to see the interest that all the visitors took in the presentation. Barry Smallwood organised the very popular 'Brass and Reed' band in the early 70's and wrote in our visitors book *'What a brilliant day meeting former band members - What super memories'*.

Tim Westrip, final head of the school, added *'Very impressed by the exhibition'*



Ex Hillside Headmaster Keith Newson (right)
with ex Head of Music, Barry Smallwood

Over the Halloween period a number of creepy creatures were introduced into the museum displays and children

had the opportunity of searching for them and claiming their reward of goodies and stickers. These museum trails have proved very popular with our younger visitors.

The Hillside exhibition will run until mid January when it will be replaced with a commemoration of WW1 starting on 20th January 2015.

On 26th September a surprise party was held at Schopwick Place for the 70th Birthday of museum manager, David Armitage. Somehow the event was kept secret from Dave and it provided a great start to his weekend of celebration. A good turn out of volunteers were there to share in the buffet, Pimms and fittingly Champagne. Congratulations to Dave.

The volunteers were back at Schopwick on 5th December for a Christmas party. Many thanks to Ann & Norman Shuker for providing the wonderful venue and thanks also to the volunteers who organised these two events.

The Object in Question

(A closer look at the history of 4 museum exhibits)



**Napoleon death mask
(RH display cabinet)**

After his final defeat at the battle of Waterloo in 1815 Napoleon was exiled to the British controlled island of St Helena, a remote windswept rock in the South Atlantic. He died there, probably of stomach cancer, in 1821 at the age of just 51. He was attended in his final days by both French and British physicians.

During the time of Napoleon Bonaparte, it was customary to cast a death mask of a great leader who had recently died. Although there is some debate as to who took the original death mask it was very probably Dr Francis Burton of Britain's 66th Regiment who also presided at the Emperor's autopsy.

A mixture of wax or plaster was carefully placed over Napoleon's face and removed after the form had hardened. From this impression, subsequent copies were cast. Much mystery and controversy surrounds the origins and whereabouts of the most original cast moulds. There are only four genuine death masks known to exist. A rare plaster mask of Napoleon was recently sold for £175,000.

This death mask is important because it is a direct mould of his face 2 days after he died and is more representative of what he looked like than a painting. Artists of the time were well known for embellishing in a positive manner how very powerful and regal people looked.

All very interesting you may say, but where is the connection to our area?

For the answer to this question we must look at Barham House (later Hillside) in Allum Lane, Elstree, where in the early 1800's lived a wealthy merchant, Richard Baker and his daughter Martha. Martha married Lt Colonel Joseph Burton, brother of the aforementioned Dr Francis Burton, physician to Napoleon on St Helena and probable originator of his death mask. A somewhat tenuous connection!

Incidentally Martha and Joseph Burton had a son, Richard Burton, who became a famous explorer and whose remarkable life we glimpsed in the previous newsletter.



**Panama Hat
(Lower drawer, LH display cabinet)**

Doesn't look much does it, but this shapeless hat was the basis of a business that flourished in Borehamwood in the early 1900's.

The Italian family of Cambi began bleaching and dyeing Panama hats in 1908. Their main factory was in Shenley Road, in what is now the Shopping Park and was situated approximately where Argos now stands. The entrance was down a lane now called Keystone Passage. There was also a factory at the top of Drayton Road. The Cambi's developed a system for bleaching the hats white and giving them a unique glossy sheen. After processing the hats were hung on rows of pegs to dry and looked like a miniature forest of giant toadstools. Panama hats are in fact made in Equador, although they are shipped all over the world from the port of Panama, hence the probable origin of their name.

In 1908 the Panama Canal was being constructed and as well as the workers on the project, both President Theodore Roosevelt and King Edward V11 were photographed wearing them. In consequence they became very popular.

In more recent times the list of celebrities wearing these stylish hats is almost endless. Humphrey Bogart, Sean Connery, and Peter O'Toole all wore them. The price range of Panama hats is enormous. You can buy one for as little as £25, but for the very best which are made in the town of Montecristi, you can pay thousands of pounds. It is all down to the weaves per inch. A "superfino" Panama hat can, according to popular rumour, hold water, and when rolled for storage, pass through a wedding ring.

So there we have the reason for the hat in the museum exhibits. It is amazing that an Italian family chose Borehamwood to start a business bleaching and dyeing Panama hats that are made in Equador but they did, and it is part of our history. The museum hat looks nothing like a real Panama hat. This is because after bleaching and dyeing the hats were sent to Luton, a couple of stops up the Midland railway line, for blocking and finishing. They then look like this - and they come with a licence to kill!





Police Box Sign (Above reception desk)

This is the illuminated sign above the door of a police box and was once a familiar sight in all British towns. The police box is a kiosk or callbox located in a public place for the use of members of the police or the public to contact the police. Unlike an ordinary callbox, its telephone is located behind a hinged door so it can be used from the outside, and the interior of the box is, in effect, a miniature police station for use by police officers to read and fill out reports, take meal breaks, and even temporarily hold prisoners until the arrival of transport.

Police boxes predate the era of mobile telecommunications and now British police officers carry two-way radios or mobile phones rather than relying on fixed kiosks. They were therefore phased out and removed around 1970.



Police Box in Shenley Rd c1960

The typical police box contained a telephone linked directly to the local police station which allowed patrolling officers to keep in contact with the station, reporting anything unusual or requesting help if necessary. A light on top of the box would flash to alert an officer that he/she was requested to contact the station. Members of the public could also use the phone to contact a police station in the event of an emergency.

Today the image of the blue police box is widely associated with the science fiction television programme Doctor Who and is known as a TARDIS. Full marks if you know the meaning of that acronym!

Most young people may not realise how familiar they once were. In 1953 there were 685 police boxes on the streets of London.

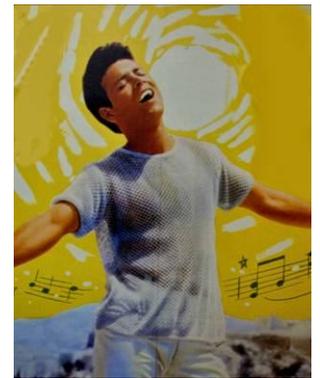


Cliff Richard Tee shirt (RH display cabinet)

In 1963 the film 'Summer Holiday' was released. It was made at Elstree Studios and became Cliff Richard's most successful film. This is the actual Tee shirt that Cliff wore for some of the scenes in the film and was also featured in advertising posters. Cliff and his backing group, The Shadows, were immensely popular at the time and between them had produced many hit records.

The story concerns 4 young bus mechanics at Aldenham bus works who persuade London Transport to lend them an RT double decker bus which they convert into a holiday caravan and drive across continental Europe. Their eventual destination is Athens, Greece. Inevitably they meet with girls along the way and romance blossoms.

It captured the imagination of a young generation and was a huge box office success in Britain. It flopped in America possibly because it was released there within days of the assassination of John F. Kennedy. A nation in mourning were not able to appreciate the light hearted flippancy that made the film so appealing to us.



Advertising poster for 'Summer Holiday'

To understand the appeal of the film we must go back to that time. Foreign travel was a relatively new idea for most people, Rock and Roll was only a few years old and the swinging sixties was just beginning to bloom. To combine all of these in a film was a great concept and the idea of dancing on a Greek beach with lots of young guys and girls all combined to produce a film which we look back on with fond memories to this day.

On 20th January 2015, the museum will open an exhibition to commemorate WW1. If you can provide any information, articles or exhibits for our displays please contact the museum. There will be a special event on 17th January to preview the exhibition and this will include a private viewing. Details are available from the museum.

Museum Outreach News

As part of the Museum's commitment to involve all members of our community in the area's rich, local heritage, a reminiscence group for the over 60s was launched in October.

'Going Down the Village' has attracted a good deal of interest and support, with some 27 people coming to the first session, sharing memories on the theme of 'Shops and Shopping' over a cuppa and a biscuit. A range of photographs from the Museum's collection provided the stimulus for conversation.



Alan Lawrence and Ruth Stratton enjoy 'Going down the Village'

The sessions have proved very popular and in November over 35 people came to share their memories of the pubs in the area, many of which no longer exist.

Conversation ranged from the Silver Service at the Red Lion, now

McDonalds, to the local Folk Club held on the top floor, to encounters with Trevor Howard and Tommy Steele. We even heard a rendition of the Double Diamond advertising slogan by one of our visitors! Needless to say there was a lot of shared laughter and fun.

One of the Librarians from Welwyn gave us a brief introduction to Hertfordshire Libraries' Reminiscence Collection and to the range of library services available for Carers. In the future the Museum hopes to use the Reminiscence Rummage Boxes, which the Library Service can provide, to supplement the material used in these meetings.

In December, our theme will be 'celebrating Christmas'. 'Going Down the Village' continues to go from strength to strength and if the numbers continue to grow, the Museum may have to consider a larger, alternative venue. Vania, Community Learning Officer, is already making plans for the New Year and is looking for volunteers to put together some material for future topics. If you can help please contact her via the museum's web site or phone the museum and leave a message.

Thanks to Lynda Marshall, Melody Mallett, John Woolston and David Armitage for their research and assistance in making this venture such a success.

Schools Outreach News

At the beginning of the academic year, in September, Vania sent out letters and posters to all primary and secondary schools to remind them of the outreach services the Museum has to offer as well as current and future exhibitions. As a result, in October, Dave Armitage and Vania gave a presentation on the History of Borehamwood to sixty, Year 3 pupils and five adults at Hertsmeare Jewish Primary School, in Radlett. In addition, Vania was able to trial a new mini workshop in which the children were given a set of photographs of Borehamwood today and Borehamwood 100 years ago and asked to spot the differences and discuss what had changed.

Both activities were well-received and the children sent some wonderful thank you letters to both Dave and Vania at the Museum.

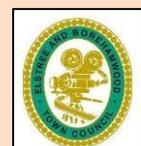
In November, the Museum was asked if it would be interested in participating in the 'Words in the Wood Literacy Project' organised by Hertswood Academy. The project involves all the schools in the area and the theme for March 2015 will be based on a children's book about World War One. Discussions are on-going and Vania is very hopeful that the Museum will be able to work with both the schools and the Library Service and link its forthcoming World War One Exhibition to this exciting project.

In the last newsletter we congratulated Shenley WI on their 95th Birthday. However, their first President was Mrs Riches (not Mrs Richardson as printed) and their membership in 1924 was 120 (not 14). We are happy to correct these mistakes and wish them every success as they head towards their centenary.

We would also like to take this opportunity to wish all our museum 'Friends' a Happy New Year and hope we can look forward to your generous support in the future. Thankyou!

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Open 12pm - 6pm Tues, Wed & Thurs
10am-3pm Sat



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