



# Tewkesbury Museum Newsletter

**MARCH  
2022**

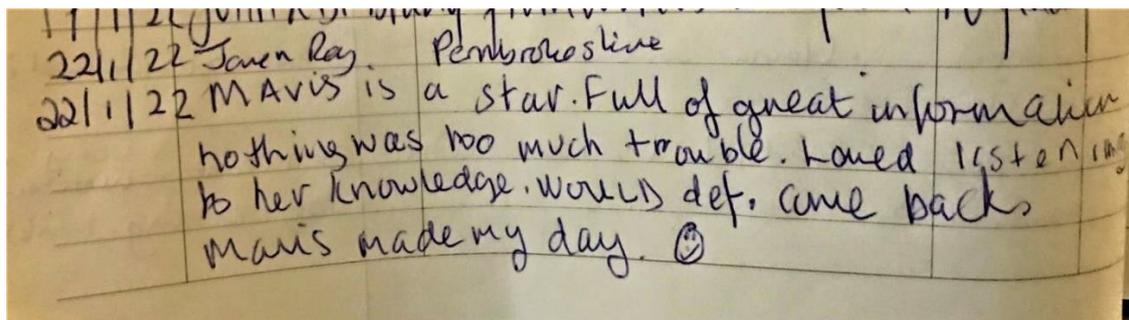
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## **VOLUNTEERS AND VISITORS**

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There have been a lot of challenges in keeping the Museum open through the months since we were permitted to reopen. If we measure success by visitor numbers, though, then we've done very well indeed. Despite not yet moving to daily opening we're well on course to exceed 2,000 visitors this year. October, when we did manage to open for six days a week, brought 574 visitors, which easily beats our previous record of 484 in 2014.

Not only are people coming but they're also enjoying their visit. There is some wonderful evidence for this in the visitor book, reproduced below. Despite her bumpy ride these last few years, Mavis continues to set the standard for greeting visitors.



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## **TALKS AND WALKS**

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At last the covid situation has improved sufficiently to allow the museum to start the talks programme again. Arrangements will be substantially as before, with a spring and autumn series, five talks over a couple of months, on Tuesday evenings, starting at 7.00pm in the Trinity Church Hall. Admission is a very reasonable £3, including tea and cake, with a discount for volunteers. The dates are 15 March, 5 April, 19 April, 3 May and 17 May.

The first talk, on 15<sup>th</sup> March, is on the subject of Tewkesbury's jail and its inhabitants. Those are on both sides of the iron bars! The speaker is Steve Goodchild.

Meanwhile, Alley strolls are held fortnightly on Sunday afternoons, 2.30pm for a couple of hours (moving to a weekday evening in May). The structure of the walks is very loose, and to visit all the town's alleys takes at least three walks. They raise funds for the museum and for the 'Alleycats' project. They're advertised on the Museum and Bishop's Walk notice boards and on Facebook. Next is on Sunday 13<sup>th</sup>.

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## TEWKESBURY GUIDING ANNIVERSARY

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The Tewkesbury Guides are celebrating 100 years of having a platoon in Tewkesbury, and part of their celebration is an exhibition in the Museum. Lacking an exhibition space, they've been offered a cabinet in the Victorian Room, which will be cleared for them, a space in the corner by the window plus the front window for displays. It isn't a lot, but they're happy with it. They're setting up the display ready to open with a small ceremony on Saturday March 19<sup>th</sup>. The exhibition will remain in place until September.

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## GLOUCESTERSHIRE ARCHIVES

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Archives are the bread and butter of historical research and the internet has revolutionised their use, with archive organisations putting their catalogues on-line and, in some cases, even making content available to remote users through scanning or transcribing documents. County Archives are the first place to look for information, and Gloucestershire Archives (Heritage Hub) have recently restructured their catalogue to make searching it more straightforward. They have been running webinars explaining all this, now published on [YouTube](#).

Gloucestershire Heritage Hub also have a wide range of videos about local history. Nothing specifically about Tewkesbury, but maybe that could be remedied? Their YouTube Home Page is [here](#).

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## THE STITCH STORY

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Tewkesbury Culture is a creative network & resource to promote collaboration, support and access to culture for people in Tewkesbury. Hosted by the Roses, it brings together a number of groups with arts and heritage interests. It has obtained funding to create a tapestry, the 'Stitch Story'.

STITCH STORY.... will celebrate the town's heritage through the creation of a combined physical and digital embroidery. This project will ambitiously attempt to get every Tewkesbury resident to sew a stitch in a new eight panel tapestry, by gathering people at a series of artist-led workshops in key venues and in pop-up locations around the town. Alongside these workshops, young 'Digital Storytellers' will digitally record people's stories to create a contemporary social history of the town.

Lead artist Jo Teague and collaborators will take over the Museum Talk on **Tuesday 3<sup>rd</sup> May** to recount the story of the tapestry, encourage our audience to share some of the memories of Tewkesbury and to add their individual stitches to the artwork.

When finished, all the panels of the Stitch Story will be joined together as a memorial to the first 900 years of Tewkesbury's history. Be there!

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## **INTELLECTUAL PROPERTY RIGHTS**

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Intellectual Property covers a huge range of created items, and in some cases a great deal rests upon rights being maintained. It affects museum activities generally in the area of copyright, and especially the use of photographs and printed matter. The area is very complicated, and it seems sometimes that people make it more complicated than it really is for the sorts of activities which the museum routinely engages in. The SWMD team offers copyright advice and holds regular copyright forums, but a straightforward way of learning about the basics is to watch the videos which the Government Intellectual Property Office has published to give a bit of background to the various strands of the subject. They are available on [YouTube](#).

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## **PLUS ÇA CHANGE .....**

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In June 1884, the Gloucester Citizen carried this news item:

### ***ESCORTING ANTI-VACCINATORS TO PRISON.***

*On Monday night a large crowd assembled at Leicester, and walked in procession through the streets to witness a woman named Tompkins, and two men named Stevens and Deeming, give themselves up to the police to undergo a week's incarceration for non-payment of vaccination fines. The defendants walked in front with a large coloured banner, bearing the words, "They that are whole need not a physician." The parties were loudly cheered as they entered the police station. A large indignation meeting was held afterwards. There are now three men and one woman undergoing imprisonment.*

In the same edition there was a letter from William Tebb quoting Herr G. T. Kolb, chief of the Royal Statistical Commission of Bavaria, who had figures which allegedly demonstrated the complete ineffectiveness of the small pox vaccine. In every other aspect, William Tebb was an inspirational role model, but he had an obsessive view about the evils of vaccination which his son, a properly qualified doctor, inherited.

Far from being universally welcomed, Dr Jenner's discovery was looked upon with huge suspicion by a public who were treated by an unregulated medical profession which still didn't fully accept the means of transmission of infection and the need for aseptic procedures. One textbook even suggested that a source of cholera was eating cold fruits, like cucumber or melon.

There were big risks of infection arising from vaccination because of lack of attention to cleanliness, but nevertheless the results were so dramatic that the government offered every encouragement, first by making it free, and then making it compulsory. There was a backlash from a suspicious public, some concerned about the motives and some the principles of civil rights.

Leicester became the centre of resistance. The Medical Officer there made it compulsory to report cases of smallpox. He then isolated the patient, quarantined the family and disinfected their belongings. This, of course, achieved good results. It was promoted by the anti-vaccinators as the 'Leicester Method', to be used instead of, not alongside, vaccination. Prosecution of vaccine refusers was routine, and no excuses were accepted. People were fined and even imprisoned. All over the country there were demonstrations and even riots,

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leading to a huge demonstration in Leicester in March 1885. The government was concerned but unmoved.

A major return of smallpox in 1892 showed the value of vaccination, and a clear correlation between vaccination and low infection. A vaccination Act in 1898 allowed opting out for reasons of conscience. Medical practice improvements and compulsory smallpox reporting, though, led to the eradication of smallpox in Britain. The smallpox anti-vaccination movement faded away, though the idea that inoculation with cowpox puss could give immunity to smallpox was resisted to the end.

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## **1903 ADVERTISEMENTS**

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A recent addition to the Museum collection is a Tewkesbury guide book from 1902/03. It's a hard back, locally-published, book with a comprehensive set of full-page advertisements for local traders, about 60 in all. Most feature photographs of the premises, and are a fascinating glimpse back to the days when butchers proudly hung a row of carcasses outside their shop and sold 'sausages in season'. Whilst a lot of these have appeared elsewhere, individually, there hasn't been a full set published since the book. We have scanned them all and identified locations. With the considerable help of Wendy Snarey short cameos are being written for each property, and we'll be publishing one a week on the Museum Facebook page (and maybe Instagram) to raise local interest, and get reminiscences about the life of the property since 1903.

As a small 'taster', in 1903 59 Church Street, the Abbey Tea Rooms today, was the Abbey Studio, home to Tewkesbury photography since 1892. Not the first studio in town; that seemed to be Mr Stowe, who was practicing at 37 High Street in 1868. It would be wonderful to have sight of their archives, though I suspect that there would be many more straight backs and stiff moustaches than views of our picturesque alleys!

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## **BLASPHEMY AT THE ABBEY?**

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Festivals seem to be part of life in Tewkesbury, and there seems sometimes to be a continuous process of festival creation and decay in the town. A recent donation of a programme from the 1938 festival gives a little detail about a series, started in 1935, and continuing through four years to 1939. Possibly the war brought an end to the venture, but a loss of £89 made in 1939 might have hastened it. In that year the Friends of the Abbey hoped to contribute funds to assist with works to Abbey Lawns House, newly acquired by the Abbey Lawns Trust.

1938 consisted of a week of plays and talks accompanied by a garden party on the Abbey House Lawn, a Festival Ball at the Mythe House and a Festival Club at the Bell Hotel. One of the speakers was Dorothy L Sayers; her subject 'Author, Actor, Audience'. The only named organiser was John Moore, working with the Friends of the Abbey. The dramatic content was two modern miracle plays, performed outside the West end of the Abbey, written by James Bridie; 'Tobias and the Angel' and 'Jonah and the Whale'. Profits were to go to the Abbey Tower Fund.

It was not without controversy, though. The 'Register' carried the following news item at the planned end of the Festival:

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## **PERFORMANCES TO CONTINUE ANOTHER WEEK: MR. JOHN MOORE'S CHALLENGE**

*The organisers of Tewkesbury's Festival were amazed when they learned late on Wednesday evening that the Parochial Church Council of St. Mark's, Cheltenham, had sent to the Bishop of Gloucester a resolution of protest against the two Bridie plays which have been performed throughout this week before the Great West Front of the Abbey and which will also be performed there during next week.*

*The decision to continue the Festival another week was arrived at in view of the great demand for tickets for the plays.*

*The resolution of protest reads as follows: "This Council views the programme of the Tewkesbury Festival as dishonouring to God and His works, in the nature of blasphemy, and a hindrance to the furtherance of true religion in our land."*

*Immediately Mr. John Moore, the author and general secretary of the Festival heard the protest he immediately offered to supply free seats to all the members of St. Mark's Parochial Church Council. He has also challenged them to a debate on the stage next Tuesday afternoon. If his challenge is accepted then Miss Dorothy Savers has offered to represent the interests of the Festival.*

*The Vicar of Tewkesbury Abbey, the Rev. E. P. Gough, has declined to make any comment. but at a lecture of the Religious Drama Society in the Town Hall on Thursday he announced that he will preach on the plays on Sunday evening.*

*It is understood that the Vicar of St. Marks's, Cheltenham has said that he thoroughly dislikes the plays and his council are in complete agreement with him.*

Maybe no publicity is bad publicity. The Rev, Gough addressed the issue in his sermon the following week and spoke very forcefully about the nature of the charge against the play, and by association the Abbey. The Vicar of St Mark's had taken offence at the prologue of the play, where it was said that God laughed, which they alleged was a blasphemy. Rev. Gough disagreed.

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## **DIGITAL COLLECTIONS**

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A new expression has sneaked into the language; 'born digital', which refers to a photograph or text which was created that way rather than one which has been scanned or otherwise digitised.

Digital collections are much more accessible than physical items and their use has huge advantages. The amazing collection of books freely available through 'archives.org', the British Newspaper Archive and the on-line galleries now being developed by a lot of museums and archive organisations. It makes research immensely easier as well as allowing browsing through documents without having to visit. It also allows precious document contents to be displayed in innovative ways, as the John Moor Museum have done with the Baptist minute books, for instance.

TownsWeb Archiving is a company which has been responsible for creating a lot of digital archives; HSBC Bank, Sandhurst College and Herefordshire Local History are just three examples which are now publicly available. They recently held a webinar to give an overview of how digital collections are created, indexed and used. It's been made available on [YouTube](#). Videos of presentations are never as good as being there, but nevertheless it's worth a look as its going to be the future!

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## A CABINET OF DELIGHTS

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These snippets appeared in the Tewkesbury Register and Magazine for 1840:

*In digging the foundation for the railway station-house in this borough, the workmen discovered, within a few yards of High-Street and at the depth of about eleven feet, a perfect Roman sepulchral urn, containing a quantity of wood ashes, some fragments of bones, and a silver coin of the Emperor Septimius Severus. Immediately beneath the urn was found an ancient earthen vessel, filled with wood ashes; and imbedded in the adjoining soil was a fine copper coin of the Emperor Commodus. These are all now in the collection of Mr. Dudfield, of this town.*

And this from 1841:

*Mr. James Dudfield, of this borough, who has long been indefatigable and successful in searching for antediluvian remains in this neighbourhood, found three magnificent specimens: one of the Plesiosaurus and two of the Ichthyosaurus. Of the latter, there is a head of immense size, measuring in length thirty-two inches. The eyes, in which the sclerotic plates are very perfect and beautifully radiated, are eight inches in diameter. The mouth, which contains about ninety teeth, is twenty-six inches long. The girth of the upper part is forty-one inches, and its weight sixty-seven pounds. What renders this specimen particularly valuable is, that the peculiar position in which it was imbedded in the rock has prevented its being crushed or flattened.*

*IN the summer of 1841, an old English gold coin was dug up, by a labouring man, at the top of Perry Hill Garden, near this borough, which proved to be a noble of Henry the Sixth, in good preservation. On the obverse is St. George (winged) and the Dragon, and a legend, HENRIC DEI GRA. REX ANG. ET FRAN.*

*On the reverse is the prow of a ship, and a shield with the arms of England and France quarterly, surmounted crestwise with a cross of England. On the dexter side of the cross is the letter H, and on the sinister side a rose; and the legend is XTE RE PER CRUCEM TOAM SALVA NOS.*

*It may be thought idle to speculate upon the means by which this coin became imbedded nearly two feet deep in the earth, in such a situation; but were we to suggest, that it may have remained in the same locality ever since the battle between the Houses of York and Lancaster, which took place in the immediate vicinity of the spot where it was discovered, it must be acknowledged, that antiquaries have frequently been permitted to indulge in suppositions far more improbable.*

*This beautiful gold piece is now in the possession of Mr. Dudfield, druggist, of this town: it weighs seventy-eight grains, and is about the size of a modern half-crown.*

James Dudfield was a 'druggist and grocer' as well as an enthusiastic amateur collector. In 1843 he was declared bankrupt. Everything he owned was auctioned, including his extensive collection of 'Organic Remains' which took place at the Clarence Gallery in Cheltenham. The best Ichthyosaurus head went to Rendcomb Park but there is no specific mention of the Roman items. The gold Noble (or possibly Angel) would today be worth tens of thousands of pounds. Its disposal isn't mentioned.

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## THE MUSEUMS THAT MAKE US

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For those who listen to the radio, or maybe podcasts, there's an interesting series of programmes coming up. On Monday March 7<sup>th</sup>, and for two weeks there are a series of

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fifteen-minute programmes exploring the purpose of museums. The programme website says:

*“Neil MacGregor presents a new series for BBC Radio Four celebrating the museums to be found in all corners of Britain. The ambition is to explore local, regional and city museums across the length and breadth of the country, and in the process to answer the question 'What are Museums for in 2022?'.*

*“Museums have always been telescopes trained on the past to help locate a sense of place in the present. Neil believes that role is an active one, responding to changes in the people museums serve and the shifting social and cultural landscape they inhabit. After spending much of his life at the centre of our national Museum life in London, Neil is taking to the road to discover more about the extraordinary work being done in Museums outside the capital, from Stornoway to Stowmarket, and Belfast to Birmingham.*

*“In each episode he visits a single museum, inviting them to choose an object from their collections which they feel best illustrates their civic role, and the way they relate and want to relate to their local audience. Very rarely have they chosen a crown jewel from their often priceless collections. More often it's an object with a particular local resonance, or which helps tackle episodes from the past which are being viewed very differently by citizens in the 21st century.*

*“He'll be visiting the great national museums of Wales, Northern Ireland and Scotland, as well as major city institutions in Birmingham, Leeds, Liverpool and elsewhere. And in spite of the challenges of the last two years, everywhere he meets passionate teams who are dedicated to providing a unique experience for both local audiences and visitors from further afield.*

*“Neil writes: "What's going on in our museums is at once challenging and exciting and it can only really be understood by visiting as many as possible and finding out how they have approached what is a vital role in providing a sense of local, regional and national identity.”*

To reach the programme website, [click here](#).

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## **NEARLY SIXTY .....**

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From the 'Register', 4 May 1962:

*An event, which although it will not make a stir elsewhere, is at least important in local history, will take place in Tewkesbury on Friday May 11. At 3 p.m. Sir George Dowty will formally open the Tewkesbury Museum. Probably some people will take a dim view of the museum venture, but it does at long last bring Tewkesbury into line with all the sizeable and forward-looking boroughs in Great Britain. Much that belongs to Tewkesbury's past has already been lost because there was no suitable place in which archives, pictures, furniture and other objects could be kept. For instance, very few relics of the stocking loom period survive, and not many implements that were used in 18th century and 19th century farming. A good many educated people are interested in all these things, and will find there is at least another place open to the public besides the Abbey and the old Baptist Chapel.*