



# Tewkesbury Museum Supporter's Newsletter

OCTOBER  
2022

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October is taking us a little past the season of mists and mellow fruitfulness, and with the Mop Fair about to descend on the streets the next milestone will be Christmas and the depths of winter. The over-hot museum reception is now a thing of the past, and we have chilly days and lots of layers to look forward to. Even heating becomes an issue, with uncertain protection against escalating non-domestic costs and the museum's usage rising from a summer 10kWh per day to as much as 75 on a cold day. A mild winter would be good for us, ignoring the other implications.

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## Skeletons at the Gas Works

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Tewkesbury's old gas works was on the edge of the town, at the northern end of Oldbury Road. The site is still used in part for gas distribution infrastructure but most of it is now occupied by the fire station. The only original remnant, probably, is the recently restored brick wall along the Gas Alley boundary.

The area holds a secret. It seems to have been the cemetery for the Roman-era settlement which existed in Tewkesbury between the first and fourth centuries. Evidence was discovered in the construction of the gas works:

*TEWKESBURY - This town although possessing some traces of antiquities, including that of the Abbey Church, has not been so much distinguished by the historian as it properly deserves.*

*This perhaps is to be attributed to there being no antiquary resident on the spot. Relics are discovered, but those by whom they are brought to light, knowing little of their value, they are not appreciated. Last week as the men were excavating the earth for the foundation of the New Gas Works erecting here, they came to what to what appeared to be a well, filled up ; among the earth thrown out, there were the remains of several animals, and presently some urns of baked clay were discovered. After the men had discovered six urns they came to a human skeleton, and below which two other urns were found containing red earth. The whole of the articles discovered are preserved and open to the inspection of the antiquary and visitor.*

- Cheltenham Chronicle - Thursday 20 September 1832

*TEWKESBURY - Interesting Discovery. — During the progress of some extensive operations at the Gas Works, which have been going on since Easter last, no less than six distinct skeletons have been found, mostly at a depth of about 7ft. below the surface. A small silver coin was also turned up a few days ago, but whilst in course of examination, it dropped again into the mud and water, and has not been picked up. When the Gas Works were originally constructed, about 60 years ago, six or seven skeletons were then unearthed, together with some pottery, a lot of masonry, and bones of animals, and the character of the discoveries, and their position, led to the conclusion that the present site of*

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*the works was the burying ground of an early British settlement on the spot where Tewkesbury now stands.*

- Worcester Journal - Saturday 17 September 1892

The Gloucestershire Historic Record has more information, from the 'Yearly Record', and some discussion:

*"A well, probably late C1-early C2 ritual shaft, was found at Tewkesbury gas works in 1840. It is 12' (3.6m) deep, lined with lias, and containing the skulls of a bear, a horse, two oxen, two dogs and a human. At the bottom were at least a dozen urns of fine red clay, probably with cremations. Nearby were six or seven human skeletons variously orientated and a masonry structure 8' (2.4m) long, 2' (0.6m) wide and 16" (0.4m) deep. The bottom was a flat stone with strong traces of burning on the side walls."*

*A 'well' with skulls and interned cremations probably of late C1-early C2 date. A 'ritual shaft' of a type now fairly familiar in Romano-British and earlier archaeology. A shaft with almost identical contents has been recorded at Biddenham. Water cults were an important element in Celtic religion and it is possible that the proximity of the Oldbury shaft to the junction of the Rivers Severn and Avon is no coincidence and implies some form of cult centre which may have had earlier origins.*

It seems that one of the urns found in 1832 survived, and is in Worcester Museum.

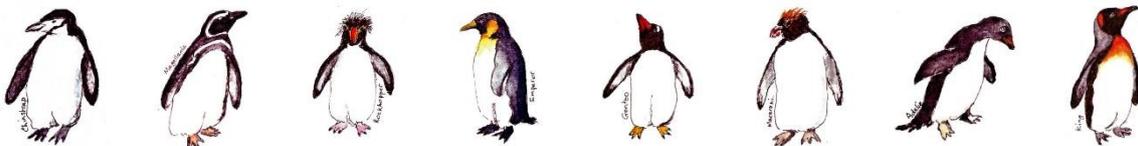
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## **P-P-P-Penguins**

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In 2019 Sue Edlin kindly contributed to our programme with a talk about Raymond Priestley. In the audience was a girl who was doing a school project on the Antarctic. She wrote to the museum suggesting that we should have a penguin trail as an alternative to the ever-popular mouse hunt. The idea was approved, and penguins were recruited from charity shops and elsewhere. Events, though, got in the way and they were consigned to a bag in a cupboard.

The transfer of the Raymond Priestley exhibit to the ground floor seemed an ideal opportunity to resurrect the idea. Mavis produced wonderful paintings of eight Antarctic penguin species which have been used to make a new range of badges. The mice have been put on furlough and penguins now lurk around the building. Penguin Trail (not hunt) paperwork has been prepared and all we need now is children to visit!



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## **Salmon Fishing**

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Among the stack of general correspondence in the museum's files is a hand-written letter, dating from 1981, from a Worcester fishmonger:

*Dear Sir/Madam*

*Would you like to accept the enclosed photograph –taken by myself – circa 1934 - showing salmon fishermen at work at the Lower Lode, with Tewkesbury in the far, indistinct background?*

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*In days gone by my father, grandfather and great grandfather were fishmongers poulterers and game dealers in High Street, Worcester and after salmon fishing by netting was prohibited in 1929, in the Severn above the Lower Lode, it became necessary to go further afield to purchase fresh salmon, so on many Thursday afternoons we came to Tewkesbury to take back salmon to Worcester.*

*The name of the family of fishermen was Booth and who lived in Fletcher's alley (I expect that you know all about the local fishermen; we also used to buy lampreys from them as well)*

*Rediscovering the enclosed photo the other month I thought of sending it along to your local newspaper but as 2<sup>nd</sup> February (the opening of salmon fishing season) has come and gone as well as the topicality of the picture I thought that it I might as well send it to you, if it adds anything to the history of Tewkesbury*

*Yours sincerely, R J Collins*

The photograph wasn't with the letter. It will be somewhere in the copious collection of photographs, and there were no clues to help find it, unfortunately. Nevertheless, the letter gives clues to the extent of salmon fishing less than 100 years ago, and explains why so many Tewkesbury men had 'fisherman' as their trade, and indeed why Fish Alley is so named.

An article about the history of the Ham published in the 'Bushley Almanack' of 1911, written by Rev, Dowdeswell of Pull Court contains a surprising extract from the Dowdeswell archive from about 1670:

*"Nota: That the 2 Fishmongers that deale with Brush for sending up Salmons, doe affirm that the reason why they are so scarce with us is because the fishermen doe not forbear taking them between May and October. They told me they had paid Brush £800 per annum for Salmons heretofore att 5d. the pound."*

Brush was the Dowdeswell agent who was based at Upper Lode. By my calculation, £800 of salmon at 5d/lb amounts to 38,000lbs. If the average fish weight was 10lbs, it is not surprising that restrictions were put on fishing in 1929, or that there are now hardly any left in the river.

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## **Autumn Talks**

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Our first autumn talk of the autumn programme has set a standard which will be hard to follow. Kirstie gave a very detailed account of the position of women in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, including stories of women who had broken the shackles and the problems they faced. Sobering stuff for some of us!

The new venue at the Baptist Church was very comfortable, and the facilities are excellent. The only negative was the frequent failure of the projector to project, despite Bill's best efforts. Kirstie took it completely in her stride, though.

Our next talk will be on Tuesday 18<sup>th</sup>, when Nick Humphris will be taking us on a virtual tour of the Roman Villa at Chedworth.

On Tuesday 1<sup>st</sup> November David Elder is going to tell us about Dr Edward Thomas Wilson (father of Edward Adrian Wilson, the explorer who went to the Antarctic with Scott and Raymond Priestley)

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The local autumn talks season is now in full swing. Other talks this month are:

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**Thursday 13<sup>th</sup> October.** Tewkesbury Civic Society: Votes for Women: Cheltenham as a hub for Suffragettes and Suffragist activity, given by John Reid. 7.30pm at the Old Baptist Chapel. (John spoke about children's comics at one of our spring meetings recently)

**Thursday 20<sup>th</sup> October.** Tewkesbury Historical Society: The Family of Oliver Cromwell 1300-1821, given by Geoffrey Bush. 7.45pm at the Methodist Church.

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## Walks

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The Sunday afternoon Alley Strolls programme is progressing well, and so far has been conducted on dry and sunny afternoons. Early days yet! October's walks are on 16<sup>th</sup> and 30<sup>th</sup> . leaving at 2.30 from Warder's Alley.

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## Centenarians

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A hundred years ago, the 'Register' published the memories of Mrs Sarah Ann Fletcher, recorded at her hundredth birthday party. They go back to the years of candles, posting inns and transportation to Australia. They are far too long to put in the newsletter and far too interesting to ignore so this month there's a supplement.

Tewkesbury's more famous centenarian, John Rogers, kept a diary, a volume of which came into the museum's hands a little while before the pandemic hit. Wendy has transcribed it.

The 108 pages cover the period from 31<sup>st</sup> October 1902 to 15<sup>th</sup> March 1903. He was 93 years old when this journal was started, celebrating his 94<sup>th</sup> birthday Extracts will feature for the next few months. Spelling, punctuation and grammar have been adjusted to improve comprehensibility. This month's introduction is short and mundane, and just comments upon the way the Borough elections were conducted:

**1902 October 31<sup>st</sup> :** *Saturday A fine day everything is very quiet here today although tomorrow is the elections of Town Councils in all the Citys and Boroughs of the Kingdom but there is no opposition with us as all the members that served during the last 3 years are to be elected during the next 3 years there names are – Mr G.P. Howell; Mr Jackson; Mr Boughton; Mr C. Moore;*

**November 1<sup>st</sup> :** *A fine day the four members I named yesterday have been duly elected on the Town Council for 3 years so everything have passed on very quietly and the people don't seem to complain for losing their votes but I think they have promised that the members that will come out next year are to be allowed to go in without opposition also*

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## Webinars

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Preservation Equipment Ltd specialise in conservation and storage items for heritage. They have joined the Zoom revolution and recently introduced a programme of talks by experts on a variety of topics related to conservation. Their latest webinar was about tips for storage, as much applicable to those precious personal things as to items in museums. It was recorded and PEL have now put it on line, accessible [HERE](#). It's worth watching if you have things to pack.

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## Finding a King

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Ten years ago, archaeologists in Leicester made a very surprising find. The remains of King Richard III were buried beneath a carpark. This was a man with local connections, inasmuch as he'd fought in the battle here in 1471, King Edward's youngest brother and loyal lieutenant. His brother George had been Lord of the Manor of Tewkesbury, through his marriage to Isobel, the heiress, and sister of Richard's wife Ann.

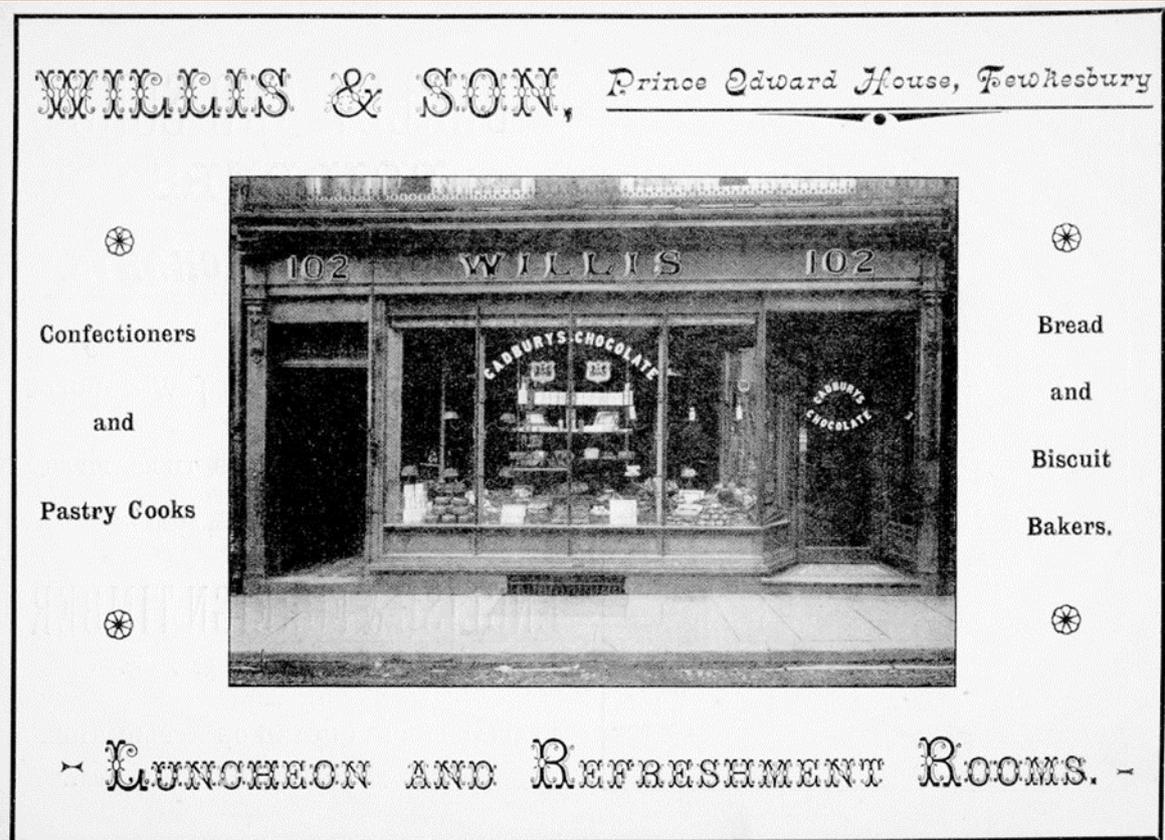
The search for his body, initiated by determined members of the Richard III Society was stranger than fiction, and the story of Philippa Langley, the woman who refused to be ignored is now the subject of a film. The *Lost King* is released this month, and is being screened at the Roses from Sunday 30 October to Thursday 3 November. It will be worth watching.

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## Past Tewkesbury

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A Tewkesbury guide book from 1902/3 contains a series of sixty full-page advertisements for Tewkesbury businesses, most with photographs of the premises. This building was once famous as Prince Edward House, but that name now seems to have been retired, or forgotten.



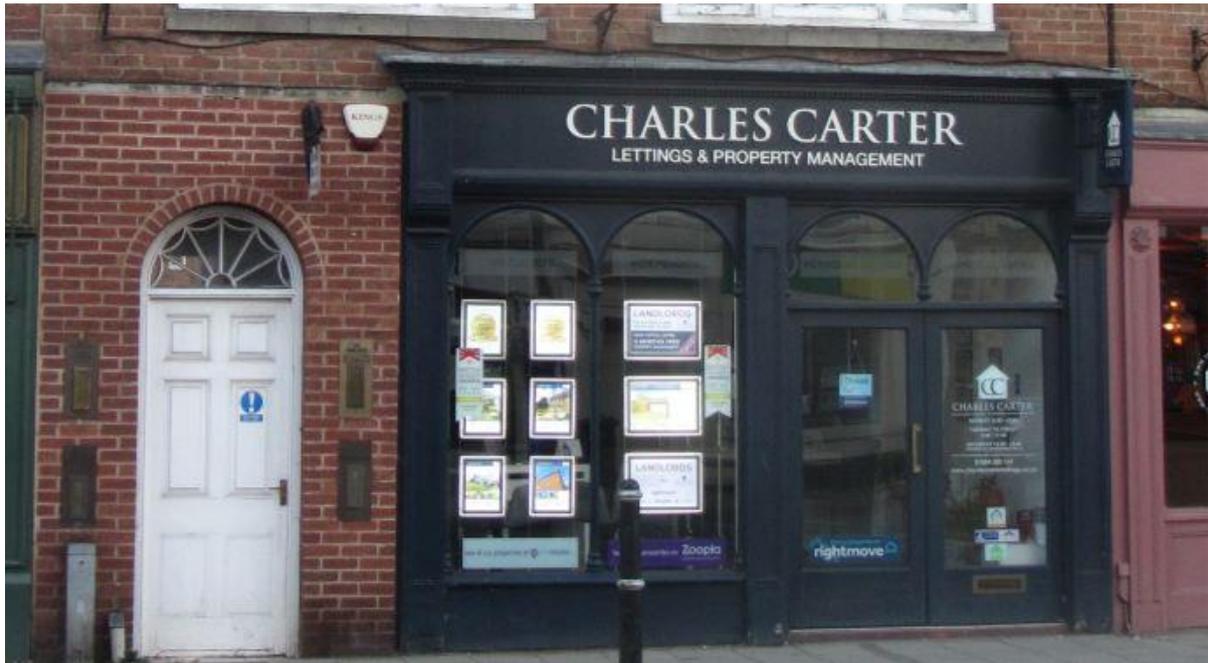
Willis and Son occupied 102 Church Street from about 1850 until 1957; three generations of John Willis's. The business was bought out by the Co-op, who were more interested in the premises, which they integrated with the other shops as far as Cross House to create their first Tewkesbury supermarket.

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The building was reputed to contain a reminder of a brutal act from long ago. Local legend has it that after the Battle of Tewkesbury Prince Edward, the captured Prince of Wales, was brought here to King Edward. He refused to swear fealty to him and he was attacked by Edward's brothers who stabbed him to death. A blood stain was left on the floor, and it was said that no amount of scrubbing could remove it. It made the house a tourist attraction. It's very unlikely to be true, but that's why it had long been called Prince Edward House. Reminiscing twenty years ago, an elderly lady who had worked there said 'They've torn it down now, but the panelling was fantastic, real oak, all in squares'.

The Co-op came and went, and 102 has been recreated as an individual shop unit. It looks quite different now, and is presently home to Charles Carter, Lettings and Property Managers.



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## CONTRIBUTIONS

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This newsletter is intended for supporters of the Museum. It is confined to local history, the background to items in the museum collection and things which the compiler thinks are interesting. I hope you also find them interesting!

Contributions are very welcome, and will add to the range and variety of topics covered. If you have a few minutes to type up something you're researched, or even to suggest a topic which might be of general interest, please email [info@teiwkesburymuseum.org](mailto:info@teiwkesburymuseum.org) .

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