



Tewkesbury Museum Supporter's Newsletter

July
2023

My apologies. There was no June newsletter and July is late. Not a very good service, but holidays and busy days got in the way. This newsletter no longer contains news from the museum, so maybe it has served its purpose? Opinions would be welcome.

Passengers have returned!



Towards the end of the restoration and re-animation of the fairground, Jenny Burt, who had done all the woodworking and fiddly model repairs, was browsing the soon-to-close Tewkesbury Auctions and found two sets of figures in a box which looked suspiciously like the missing figures from the steam yachts. Unable to persuade them to give them back, she bid for the whole box, successfully. Someone had repainted them in garish colours, but they've now been returned to authentic shades by Cameron, and a happily back enjoying the ride.

A Weighty Topic

Coffee taverns were an attempt to wean the workers off beer, by providing all the amenities and creature comforts of taverns but substituting the alcohol with coffee, tea or cocoa. Tewkesbury's first was the Victoria Coffee Tavern, which settled into premises at the Cross. It hosted the Tewkesbury Literary and Debating Society, and this account was reported in the Gloucester Citizen on March 16th 1883:

"According to the programme the debate should be an impromptu one, and the subject selected 'should museums, public libraries, &c., be opened on Sundays?' was chosen by ballot. Mr E H Parker opened the discussion with a grand speech in favour of them being so opened, and this side of the question was supported by Messrs. Gillam, Flinigan, Quilter and Chitty, while Messrs. Grimes, Spurrier, Smith, Fluck and J Howell spoke against it. The negative side of the question was carried by a majority of four."

A Privy Idea

In Chipping Norton Museum there is a toilet on display, with this explanation. It wasn't a local invention, it was something which a local gentleman had installed. The inventor was Rev. Henry Moule, Vicar of Fordingham, Dorset. In the post-cholera era he was experimenting with ways of composting waste rather than simply flushing it into the river, and developed a closet which flushed a covering of dry earth over the 'doings', which he found turned to compost within a few days. Experiments conducted by Mr Hayne of Dorchester showed that the resulting manure could be substituted for expensive guano-based products with no reduction in quality of turnips. It had obvious advantages over the then-preferred system of spreading 'night soil' on the fields, the only draw-back being that garden soil had to be collected, dried, sieved and loaded into a hopper, but as Rev. Moule remarked, that would be no more than half an hour's work a day for an old pauper.

The system was ahead of its time and lost out to water closets, but maybe composting toilets are soon to have their day.

Earth Closets

In 1860 Rev Henry Moule patented his own closet and started the Moule Patent Earth Closet Company and sold a range of models, the expensive ones made of oak or mahogany.

Basically the Moule system was to bring in earth from the garden, dry it in a metal box under the kitchen range and put it in a hopper at the back of the wooden closet, which was used indoors. After using it, you pulled a handle to flush it with dry earth from the hopper; the earth covered your production, and according to Moule rapidly removed the smell.

William Huxley

We had a visit to the museum from a descendant of John Rogers recently, to look at his dairy and journal. One of her companions asked about William Huxley, a water bailiff who lived in Quay Street next to the old Star Inn. He turned out to be a key player in a strange story, which is the subject of an interesting booklet called 'The Victorian Elver Wars'.

Living in Tewkesbury, his 'beat' seemed to have extended well beyond Gloucester. After the weir was built at Tewkesbury the elvers dried up in Worcester, but the authorities blamed over-fishing in Gloucester and had a close-season for 'the fry of eels' included in an Act of Parliament to control salmon fishing. William Huxley was the enforcer, which he seemed to do conscientiously. Men started being fined, and even imprisoned. The defence was to deny that elvers were the 'fry of eels', as is testified in this court-case, from the Gloucestershire Chronicle of 02 May 1874, in which William Huxley features:

ARE ELVERS THE FRY OF EELS?

On Saturday Joseph Edwards, fish hawk, Gloucester, Henry Hewlett, Gloucester, and William Wyman, fisherman, Longney, were summoned before the county magistrates at Gloucester for catching in the Severn the fry of eels, commonly called elvers, between Jan. 1st and June 24th inclusive. The magistrates present were E.G. Hallewell, Esq. (chairman), Capt. de Winton, and the Rev. R. Bourne Baker. Mr. Henry George, clerk to the Severn Board of Conservators, conducted the prosecution; and Mr Chesshyre, of Cheltenham, appeared for the defendants.

Mr. George said the information was laid under section 15 of the Salmon Fishery Act of 1873, which provided "That any person, between Jan. 1st and June 24th, inclusive who shall hang, fix, or use in any salmon river any baskets, nets, traps, or devices for catching eels or the fry of eels, shall incur a penalty not exceeding £2." Mr. George explained that these cases were the first brought before that bench since the passing of the Act. The elvers were the fry of eels, and ascended the river from the sea in large numbers in the spring of the year. They moved in immense shoals, in the shape of a column, along the surface of the

water, in the centre or close to the banks, occupying sometimes the width of a yard or two, and miles in length. The elvers were two or three inches in length, and were transparent in colour; as the season advanced they became green, and afterwards changed to black. He was informed that the chief point in the defence was a denial that elvers were the fry of eels. He was, however, prepared with evidence — some from the books of well known authors on pisciculture — to satisfy their worships that elvers were the fry of eels.

Mr. Chesshyre said he would raise this objection at once.

Mr. George, for convincing proof, quoted from an Act passed for the preservation of fish in the reign of Charles II. In sec. 1 the "fry of eels" were described as "commonly called elvers." In 18 George III., cap 33, an Act for the better preservation of salmon fishing, section 13 provided—"And whereas the manner of using nets and of fishing in the said river Severn, and also in the river Verniew, which runs into and communicates with it, are found to be injurious, and the taking of elvers (the brood of eels) which come out of the river Severn at a certain season in immense quantities, and afford a great support for the inhabitants of the adjacent parishes and places, are now totally prohibited by law from being taken." Mr. George said that the Salmon Fishery Act of 1881 repealed both these Acts. Last year, in consequence of the great increase in the destruction of elvers, the Legislature again interfered and passed the statute now extant. He then read extracts bearing on the question from the works of Mr. Frank Buckland and Mr. Couch, the pisciculturists.

Mr. Chesshyre objected to this, and said it was a question of science. The question was "Are these things really the fry of eels?" He denied it.

Capt. de Winton—The opinions we take for what they are worth. How do you prove the elver is the fry of eels?"

Mr. George - I can go further and call oral evidence.

The Chairman remarked - The Act of Charles II. says "The fry of eels commonly called elvers." What we want proved is that they are eels.

Mr. Chesshyre admitted the taking of "these things called elvers."

Mr. George then called John Hawkins, who on stepping into the box said, "I have been subpoenaed here, but want to know who is going to pay me before I give evidence" (laughter). — Mr. George: I will undertake that — Witness said he was in the habit of stocking gentlemen's ponds with fish. He had put in elvers caught in the Severn and cleaned the pools out before he put them in. The pools near Cheltenham had no connection with any river or stream. — Mr. George: Have you ever caught any eels there after? — Witness: Yes; and I have seen plenty. I put in a bucket of elvers, and there were always plenty of eels after that. — Capt. de Winton Was there any possible inlet? — Witness: No, sir, except storms of rain. — How soon have you taken eels out of the pools? It may be two years after; they would be very small, perhaps some five or six inches in length. Witness said he remembered selling some elvers to Miss Hale. of Hayden Villa, and putting them in a glass case with gold fish. The next time he saw them they were as big as a pipe stem. — In cross-examination witness said he could not tell whether it was the same glass case that he put them in. He had never seen an elver that Mr. Francillon had in a case. He would not be surprised to hear that one did not grow at all; it would not do for all to grow or the country would be overstocked with eels — Mr. Chesshyre: Then it's like giving a youngster gin to stop its growth! (laughter). — In reply to further questions witness said that eels would live in mud if there is a marl bottom. When he cleaned out the pools he could not say whether any eels were left in the mud.—Mr. Chesshyre: Do you know that eels will travel for miles along the grass? — Witness: No, not without there's a trickling stream — Capt. de Winton: What is your opinion about the elver? — Witness: It is a hard question, but if all the elvers came to eels boats would be scarcely able to travel up the river.

Mr. Chesshyre asserted that no spawn had ever been found in eels.

Capt. de Winton—The elver must be traced to the parent eel.

Mr. George—That is utterly impossible. I argue from the fact of its having been so mentioned in the Acts of Parliament.

Mr. Chesshyre—People made lots of mistakes in the reign of Charles II., and they do now.

William Huxley, a water bailiff, said he had been engaged most of his life on the river as a trowman and fisherman. He had been a water bailiff for five years. The elvers began to ascend the river about April on the flood tides, and descended again towards the autumn. They were then changed in colour and grown in size. The smallest size was a "stick eel," about 7 or 8 to a pound. — Mr. Chesshyre asked: You like elvers for breakfast, don't you? (laughter). Yes. — Did one of these men sell some to you the other day? Yes. — Did you see them caught? No. — Did you ever find any spawn in the eel? No.— And you have opened thousands? Yes. — Have you any knowledge where the eels spawn? In the sea. I have no knowledge of it myself. — Capt. de Winton asked what became of the other elvers that did not come down the river? — Witness said they went into the bye brooks and streams — Capt. de Winton: You never knew an elver in a pond which had to outlet? No, Sir. — Capt. de Winton: Some people prefer Severn salmon because of the food they eat — my idea is their savour is because they eat the elvers. — Witness: Yes, sir. — Mr. Chesshyre: There is no doubt salmon like them for breakfast as this man does (laughter). — In reply to Mr. Chesshyre witness said he had discovered spawn in every fish but the eel, and there was fat in that.

Capt. de Winton asked — Has no scientific man taken the trouble to discover by experiment how the eel spawns? — Mr. George said the only instance of spawn being found was near the harbour at Galway.

Capt. de Winton — What a pity, now there is an aquarium at Brighton, someone does not put in some elvers.

Mr. George. — I have no doubt it will be done.

Capt. de Winton: You are aware elvers are found in other rivers? — Mr. George: Yes. — Capt. de Winton: Why don't they run up the Wye? — Mr. George: I presume the river is against them.

Mr. Chesshyre said this case was one of great importance to all the fishermen on the Severn and the people who eat elvers. He thought the magistrates would agree with him that the onus of proof rested with the prosecution. How had it been proved that these elvers were the fry of eels? Mr. George had only instanced one opinion of Mr. Buckland to show that eels spawned. It was a scientific question, and as Capt. de Winton remarked, very easy of proof. The statement of pools being emptied and elvers put in and eels afterwards being found amounted to nothing, because it was well known that eels would travel in grass a long way in the night. It was very easy for the prosecution to bring forward a better case if the question was solved in their favour. If the magistrates thought necessary he would call Mr. Francillon and a large number of fishermen to prove they had never found any spawn in the eel.

The Chairman pointed this out from the Act of Parliament "taking elvers (the brood of eels)."

Mr. Chesshyre: It does not follow they were the fry of eels. Mr. Francillon reminds me that in those days they called women witches (laughter).

Capt. de Winton — Yes, and some of them are witches now (renewed laughter).

In reply to the magistrates, Mr. George said he had convicted two men at Tewkesbury.

Mr. Chesshyre — Oh, but they were undefended, and you had it all your own way.

The magistrates retired, and after a short absence they said they had a strong impression that elvers were the fry of eels, but that impression was not sufficiently strong to justify them in convicting the defendants. The cases were therefore dismissed.

In 1852, the Borough Council's bye laws (based a national model) were approved by the government. They say something about what concerned the authorities back then.

These clauses are the rest of the section about cleanliness. In the days when horses were stabled in the town in large numbers, pigs were kept in corners of alleys and there was not yet a sewage works in the town manure couldn't be ignored. Its proper management was important for wellbeing.

VI. - Provided always, that no occupier of any farm, or arable, or pasture land, who shall use, deposit, or dispose of the dung or manure made or employed by him in farming operations according to the usual course of husbandry, shall be liable to the penalty imposed by the second bye-law, so as such dung and manure be not mixed with any night soil or matter which shall have been removed from any privy, water closet or cesspool, and so as such dung or manure be not deposited or left in any heap or mixen at or upon any place or places within two hundred yards of any street or continuous line of houses.

VII. - Provided also, that the penal enactments of the second bye- law shall not be taken to prohibit the deposit of ashes or other materials used or required in the manufacture and preparation of bricks, so as such ashes and other materials are deposited only in the brickfields or places where such manufacture or preparations are and may be lawfully carried on, and so as such ashes and other materials be not mixed with any animal or vegetable refuse, or other offensive and noxious matter.

VIII. - Provided also, that nothing in the second bye-law contained, shall be taken to limit in any manner the powers conferred by the 59th section of the Public Health Act, upon the Inspector of Nuisances to order the occupier of any premises whatever, whereon there shall be any accumulation of manure, dung, soil, filth, or other offensive or noxious matter, to remove the same within twenty-four hours after a notice duly sent to such occupier requiring such removal.

Hiring Fairs

In the 'History of Chipping Norton', Eileen Meades recounts an anecdote from an elderly resident:

A man met a farmer who intended to engage him, only first he was going to enquire about his character. After a time they met again and the following conversation took place: "I've enquired about your character and it'll do. I'll engage you" "Ah, and I've enquired about yours, and I won't come."

Before the Roses

New Theatre opened at Tewkesbury.

On Tuesday evening the New Theatre was opened at Tewkesbury, and it is but justice to the gentlemen under whose auspices, and to the Artist under whose superintendence, it has been erected to say that it highly creditable to the taste and liberality of the one, and the skill and judgment of the other. The interior somewhat resembles Cheltenham Theatre in form, but, of course, on a smaller scale; yet fitted up with every attention to the convenience of the Auditors, and capable of containing what is termed a '£70' house. The entertainments chosen for the occasion were Moreton's play of The School of Reform, and the farce of Too Late for Dinner: the characters, with the exception the females, being sustained by Amateurs of the Town and neighbourhood. The total receipt was £61 1s 6d —A professional gentleman of great respectability, residing in a neighbouring town, on the following day offered one the Amateurs who is engaged in trade, an order to a very

considerable amount, on condition that he appeared in the next public market at Worcester, in the identical dress worn by him when he played General Tarragon: the offer was accepted; and the singular appearance of the individual in question amongst the corn-dealers at Worcester, on Saturday, excited small degree of wonder, until the cause was ascertained.

- *Hereford Journal* - Wednesday 04 June 1823

Museum Talks

We don't want to think about it, but autumn is on the way and planning has started for the museum talks series. It's too soon to give any details beyond the dates but, for your diary, those are Tuesdays October 3rd, 17th & 31st, November 28th and December 12th. December 12th is the Christmas Magic Lantern show.

Other People's Talks

The Civic Society's next talk is very appropriate for the season. John Reid is talking on the subject of Margaret of Anjou. One of the 'she wolves of France'. It will be on Thursday 13th July at 7.30.

Medieval Things

Battling against the unseasonable heat, Tewkesbury's street banners all appeared on June 11th or most of them did. There are always a few late ones! This year there are 200 on display, but some of them are in fairly remote corners. The Museum has a standard, a long flag which displays the emblems and motto of its owner. It is the standard of the unfortunate Edward, Prince of Wales, Lancastrian heir to the throne who died in the battle and is buried in the Abbey.

Rachel, at the TIC, has produced a 'banner hunt' leaflet, copies of which are available in the museum. A good way to explore the town and to learn a little about heraldry at the same time.

The Medieval Festival is over for another year. The next will be the fortieth anniversary, but there are no celebratory plans yet. If smiles and positive comments are a measure of success, then it was a success. The weather was spectacular, and caused a few problems, including the King having to pardon the Lancastrian 'traitors'. That led to a message which said that the executions were cancelled because the executioner thought it was too dangerous!

Alley Strolls

The summer programme of Wednesday evening alley strolls is now in progress, with the next walks on 19th (Barton Street) August 2nd. (Church Street) and August 16th (High Street), They start at 7.00, from the High Street at the bottom of Warder's Alley.

A Good Day Out

Back in 2002, the contractors building a new theatre for Newport, Monmouthshire, unearthed the remains of a medieval ship. Once the Council was persuaded that pretending

that it hadn't been found wasn't an option, a 'Friends' charity was established to preserve and research it. A fascinating journey began, which involved a lot of local history, ship-building history and dendrochronology. The timbers were preserved with advice from the Mary Rose Trust, a process which is now complete. The Council have now see the ship as an asset and it may soon move from the industrial unit which has been its home for twenty-one years to a purpose-made museum. On 29 July they are holding a 'Medieval Open Day' at the ship, supplemented with a range of appropriate craft displays.

<https://www.newportship.org/your-visit/events-and-talks>



CONTRIBUTIONS

This newsletter is written 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@tewkesburymuseum.org.

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